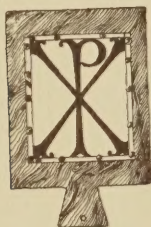


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Knowing and helping youth







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## KNOWING AND HELPING YOUTH

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# knowing and helping youth

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All Scripture quotations marked KJV are taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

All Scripture quotations marked RSV are taken from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

# **Introduction**

G. Temp Sparkman

A book is its own best advertisement. However, its distinctive features are not always evident. Therefore, it is appropriate to point out that this work goes beyond the many excellent books on youth development already on the market. The first of these features is the unusual amount of space and religious application given to the theories of Erik Erikson, Jean Piaget, and Lawrence Kohlberg. In addition, an entire chapter is devoted to the developments in religious thinking among adolescents, reporting especially on the seminal research of Ronald Goldman and John H. Peatling.

Add to these assets the discussions of the church youth as a member of family and youth culture, the suggestions on how to be a sympathetic counselor to youth, the description of the elements of a personal affirmation of faith, and the suggestions of meaningful ways youth may be involved in education, worship, mission, and witness—and you have a very helpful book.

When this book was first proposed, the table of contents was much larger than the one you find in this final version. Problems too complicated to deal with here made it necessary to trim the contents. In the process we simply had to omit some important material and to combine other material that rightly deserved treatment in separate chapters. Here are some of those omissions.

## **The Meaning of Adolescence**

What is the phenomenon of adolescence? What are the major theories of adolescence?

Adolescence is the time of life between the end of childhood and the beginning of adulthood. However, its very “in-betweenness” means that persons in the adolescent years exemplify behaviors and reveal characteristics that are both holdovers from childhood and

anticipations of adulthood. The word itself comes from a Latin word, *adolescere*, which means to grow up. The boundaries of the period are marked by a physiological development—puberty—to the full assumption of adult roles. While the notion that it is of necessity a time of turmoil and rebellion is not universally held, there is no doubt that it is a time of facing and, we hope, resolving some new conflicts not known in childhood.

Rolf E. Muuss writes in *Theories of Adolescence* (Random House, 1966) that adolescence is “sociologically, . . . the transition period from dependent childhood to self-sufficient adulthood; psychologically, . . . a marginal situation in which new adjustments have to be made, namely those that distinguish child behavior from adult behavior in a given society.”

A new use of the term *youth* has appeared in recent years to denote the period after adolescence, or what some will label young adulthood. In such a case youth means those persons who, because of a continued pursuit of education or adoption of an alternative life-style, have not yet entered completely the world of the adult.

In the present book we are using the terms *adolescents* and *youth* interchangeably. In the chapters on theory and development the reader will note that the descriptions of the years of adolescence or youth differ with the various theories. But while the psychological boundaries vary, functionally we are dealing with the school student in grades seven through twelve.

Perhaps the confusion in terms is but an indication of our confusion over the meaning of the period in our culture and our uncertainty about how to aid our children's movement from childhood to adulthood.

The confusion and uncertainty notwithstanding, there are some things that we know and some strategies that we feel confident with. This book is about some of the theories and approaches that can be recommended. There are, of course, many other important theories, such as the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud and his daughter Anna; Kurt Lewin's field theory; Robert Havighurst's developmental tasks; and other applicable theories. For discussions of these see the books *Theories of Adolescence* by Rolf E. Muuss and *Understanding Adolescence*, edited by James F. Adams (Allyn and

Bacon). Also see *Youth*, the seventy-fifth yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education.

### The Physiology of Adolescence

Many will wonder how we could hope to produce a book on understanding adolescents without a chapter on physical development. Such an inclusion lost out in the end because there are a number of excellent chapters in other books dealing comprehensively with such development. The reader is referred to updated editions of youth psychology works such as *Adolescence and Youth* by John Janeway Conger (Harper and Row) and *Understanding Adolescence*, edited by James F. Adams (Allyn and Bacon).

Of special interest to all of us should be the psychological effects of physiological development, as for example in the case of the youth who is late in maturing physically.

Gloria Durka in chapter 1 of the present book refers to some aspects of physical growth, and the importance of neurological development is critical in Jean Piaget's cognitive theory, chapter 3.

### Research

While relevant research is included in the book, there was not room for an entire chapter. The reader is referred to psychological and educational abstracts and to centers that focus on religious research, such as the Character Research Project, Schenectady, New York or the Youth Research Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota. There is some relevant research in *Research on Religious Development*, edited by Merton P. Strommen.

Stanley Watson's chapter 6 has some suggestions about counseling with youth and can be complemented by a clear picture of the dynamics involved in the problems of belief and doubt, prayer, and so on. Such is, of course, also an interest of professionals in the psychology of religion, and the reader can turn to their bibliographies for help.

### Learning Theory

Currently, learning theory is being discussed under several rubrics, among which are behavioral theory, psychoanalytic theory,

humanistic theory, and cognitive theory. See chapter 3 on Piaget for a cognitive bibliography and *Toward a Theory of Instruction* (Harvard University Press) by Jerome S. Bruner; *The Conditions of Learning* (Holt, Rinehart, and Winston) by Robert M. Gagne and *Principles of Instructional Design* (Holt, Rinehart, and Winston) by Gagne and Leslie J. Briggs (behavioral); *Psychology of Learning* (Markham) by William S. Sahakian and *Freud and Education* (C. C. Thomas) by Seymour Fox (psychoanalytic); *Freedom to Learn* (Merrill) by Carl Rogers (humanistic). For a treatment of several teaching strategies deriving from various theories see *Theories for Teaching* (Dodd, Mead and Company) by L. J. Stiles and *Models of Teaching* (Prentice-Hall) by B. Joyce and M. Weil.

### Programs in the Church

Most readers will wish that the Cromer and Boling chapters had been longer, for their subjects deserve separate treatment. For further help with these areas see the resource lists at the end of the chapters. More than likely the various denominational headquarters will have materials on worship, education, mission, and witnessing among youth.

The exciting and effective ministries being done through church recreation and music in some denominations are another means of involving and helping youth. Recreation settings provide opportunities for utilizing the concepts and strategies of education, mission, and witness presented in this book. Youth involvement in music also has a significant educational dimension, contributes to the worship of the church, and can be utilized in mission and witness settings. The editor is most familiar with the good work being done in recreation and music in his denomination through the Baptist Sunday School Board, Nashville, Tennessee.

A chapter might have been given to the planning and implementation of the youth ministry. Again, each denomination has its own approach to church's comprehensive program involving youth. Stanley Watson has a helpful book on the subject *Youth Work in the Church* (Broadman).



### Social Problems

Beyond the discussion by Robert E. Poerschke in chapter 2, there is a pervasive field of social problems. The following quote from Charles S. Ireland in *Reader's Digest*, June 1976, and referred to by newspaper columnist Carl T. Rowan, points up the problem and at the same time exposes our book for its middle-classness. "If an inner-city youngster survives and makes it to adulthood, he or she is likely to be angry, embittered, enraged. The repeated failures in school, the discriminations, the constant roadblocks, the menial jobs available—all take a terrible mental toll. The youngsters grow up feeling self-hating, worthless . . . . Their lives are so barren of hope that they have no fear of a jail sentence, a prison term, or even death." Besides the great social pathos in these words, there also is a challenge for doing more effectively what Boling is discussing in the chapter on witness and mission.

### The Book's Unity

A critical test of a multi-authored work is whether it achieves any semblance of unity or is merely a series of disconnected essays. As you read this book from chapter to chapter, you will find two expressions of a genuine unity. One, the logical progression and relation of each subject was planned and to a degree attained. But the more important element of unity was uncontrived. It simply shows through in the concern of the writers that what we are to be about in youth ministry is helping the youth toward a meaningful Christian experience that shows in some integration of personality and in being involved in God's work.

G. TEMP SPARKMAN

*Kansas City, Missouri*



# Identity—the Major Task of Adolescence

Gloria Durka

## Identity and Human Development

The crisis of adolescence is the crisis of identity. During this period, for the first time adolescents seek to clarify their understanding of who they are and what their role in society is to be. They hope to chart for themselves a perspective and direction. They hope to achieve an effective integration out of the remnants of childhood and the hopes and dreams of their anticipated adulthood. Failure to resolve this crisis results in a generalized sense of role diffusion. In extreme cases, failure can result in neurosis, psychosis, or delinquent behavior.

But the problem of identity is not merely a problem of adolescence. In our culture it is a problem that spans adolescence and is usually not resolved until adulthood, if ever. In this regard, we can distinguish between the identity crisis and identity formation. Identity formation is a lifelong process. It involves a process of simultaneous reflection and observation as well as a process of increasing differentiation. For this reason identity should never be viewed as a static established achievement but as a dynamic achievement. We should remember that the identity crisis does, however, typically occur at the end of adolescence.

During any or all of the adolescent years, the young person is fluctuating—in and out of middle childhood—in and out of maturity—in and out of adolescence. That adolescence is a confused period of human development should come as a surprise to no one, especially those who work with persons who are at this stage. Consensus on the factors that contribute to the problem appears hopeless. In the meantime, certain facts are clear:

—By middle adolescence physical growth is almost complete, sexual maturation is established, and mental development—in the

sense of ability to do logical reasoning and to understand historical perspective—is adultlike.

—Age thirteen (approximately) begins a new stage of learning and growth. Childhood is over. This new phase of growth has its own special characteristics and distinctiveness from either childhood or adulthood—youth's capacity for religious questions, abstract thinking, and so forth.

—American youth are reaching the stage of religious doubt earlier than ever before, many by the age of fifteen and some as early as thirteen.

—American society recognizes a self-conscious youth culture as a distinctive feature of the twentieth century. This phenomenon is apparently here to stay for the foreseeable future.

—Large numbers of Christian youth are not currently enrolled in any type of religious instruction program. Research indicates that current participation in religious instruction is a major factor in ability to predict devotion to religion.

—Generations of baptized Christians may be lost to the church unless a massive and more effective ministry to youth is begun soon.

—Top priority must be given to youth ministry. This means primarily the training and development of persons who specialize in ministering to youth.

—There has been a decline in traditional orthodoxy among youth. Youth today do not pray; nor do they attend weekly worship services as often as they formerly did. Christian youth are active in some church youth activities, but drop out earlier than youth in other generations.

—There is a breakaway from moral standards previously and more generally accepted. This is especially true in the areas of premarital sex; theft and shoplifting; the use of drugs and alcohol; and the taking of one's life.

—Surveys show an increased number of runaways from home, a greater degree of conflict with parents being resolved by escape means.

But in the realm of self-understanding an adolescent is uncertain and insecure. This condition is brought on by several factors: rising prosperity, the further prolongation of education, the enormously

high educational demands of a postindustrial society. For example, since 1900 the average amount of education received by children has increased by more than six years. In 1900, only 6.4 percent of young Americans completed high school, while today almost 80 percent do; and more than half of them begin college. In 1900 there were only 238,000 college students; in 1970 there were more than 7,000,000 with 10,000,000 projected for 1980.<sup>1</sup>

And behind these measurable changes lie other trends, less quantitative but even more important: a rate of social change so rapid that it threatens to make obsolete all institutions, values, methodologies, and technologies within the lifetime of each generation; a technology that has created not only prosperity and longevity but also power to destroy the planet, whether through warfare or violation of nature's balance; a world of extraordinarily complex social organization, instantaneous communication, and constant revolution. The generation that came of age in the 1962-1972 era both reflects and reacts against these trends.<sup>2</sup> Few would dispute the claim that these individuals have been deeply affected by the civil rights movement, the successful revolt against the war in Vietnam, and the first overthrow of an American president.

The passage from childhood to adulthood begins with puberty—the beginnings of sexual maturity. At the beginning of puberty a person has a well-established personality structure, including a rhythm to life, attitudes toward work and other people, self-image, and scholastic record. Then comes the experience of sexual maturation. The outward signs of sexual maturation are obvious enough. The first menstrual period for girls occurs at about the age of thirteen, although it can vary from ten to sixteen and a half. A boy, however, grows more slowly into adulthood. Sperm production and initial ejaculation come closer to the fifteenth year. The young glands are secreting a new mixture of chemicals into the bloodstream, which causes rapid and uneven growth. This upsets the emotional balance of older children. Countless psychological problems as well as numerous social difficulties may arise simply because of these physical differences.

In educational settings, groups may form within larger groups. Or the total group may take on a personality that does not fit a small



minority. These minority persons in turn can feel left out—and can drop out. It is the physical change that causes so many of the characteristics that are assigned to adolescents. They are bored with themselves—tired of being children but scared about becoming adults; they are anxious to be independent but too listless to assume responsibility. They are preoccupied with sex but are afraid to talk to adults.

Not only is this experience so powerful that it changes a person's body in size and function; but it is also so thoroughgoing that it forces teenagers to look ahead to their roles in adult life. Thus, these young persons are required to rework their lives in the light of their new situations. The major part of their lives that has to be reconsidered is their experience in the family. These family influences are very strong, as almost every study has pointed out. Yet, the teenagers are in struggle with the beliefs, patterns of conduct, and attitudes they experienced as children.

This means that the profound adjustment that individuals must make when their bodies begin to become sexually mature will be made when they as persons are less experienced and less capable of self-direction. Since the awakening of sexual impulses is also social, an excess of feelings, relationships, and fantasies are directed toward others. The process of self-understanding is rushed. The values and customs that have been inherited from childhood are put to the test prematurely. Because sexual maturation is also the experience that causes persons to move away from the influence of parents to that of their peers, individuals are exposed to general cultural conditioning at a younger age.

For American youth late adolescence begins a protracted psychosocial moratorium—a phenomenon which is found in other cultures, but which in the United States has become a way of life. It is a period when society allows, even encourages, young people to explore possibilities without committing themselves to any one of them. They are, for example, to have many friends of the opposite sex; yet they are discouraged from an exclusive pairing off until they are more ready to assume the responsibilities that such a relationship entails. They are counseled to investigate different colleges or different fields of employment before they invest themselves too

deeply in any one.

In the past, when societies were more homogeneous as a whole or in their different ethnic and religious groups, this invitation to choice did not extend to religious belief. It was assumed that adolescents would continue in the religious tradition of their families. Today, in our pluralistic, heterogeneous society, the psychosocial moratorium extends to religion as well as to choice of a marriage partner, a field of employment, a life-style, and so forth. No one has planned it this way; yet it has become a fact of life for a vast number of American adolescents. During this period youngsters can be compared to trapeze artists who, having let go of one trapeze, have not yet grabbed on to the other. They are between trapezes.

Another source of tension comes from what has been described as cultural discontinuities. The anthropologist Ruth Benedict has suggested that such discontinuities can provide a possible explanation of the origin of some of the conflicts of the adolescent period.<sup>3</sup> The theory emphasizes the sharp discontinuity American culture establishes in the development process from childhood to adulthood. For example, our society demands that children be taught certain patterns of behavior which must be discarded later if they are to be successful adults. To mention one, children are expected to be irresponsible. They make no labor contribution to the industrial society. Yet as adults they are expected to assume the responsibility of earning a living and keeping a home. In other societies this kind of discrepancy does not exist. There is a more continuous training for a responsible role because at an early age children participate with adults in performing tasks essential to the community.

Another discrepancy centers around behavior. Children are expected to obey adults until the time when they as adults are required to assume the role of dominance. This is in contrast to societies in which it is expected that a child who is docile or dominant will be accordingly a docile or dominant adult.

Sexual roles illustrate yet another discontinuity. In American society children are really expected to be sexless until they are physically mature. Adults must accept their sexual role to function as integral persons. But there is a strong resistance to the notion of childhood sexuality in our culture.

Such discontinuities may severely affect the developmental process by resulting in regression and lasting emotional distortions. Childish tendencies can tend to reappear in adulthood, and the person can remain emotionally immature.

### **Erikson and the Identity Crisis**

Erik Erikson, a prominent contemporary psychologist, identified the crisis of youth as one of establishing identity and the task of youth as growth into responsible freedom. By crisis Erikson means a crucial time or turning point of increased vulnerability and heightened potential, which becomes either a source of generational strength or maladjustment. If a person does not sufficiently develop an identity, then identity confusion results. In identity confusion the person experiences a lack of direction in life and a sense of uprootedness that leads to various forms of human apprehension. Essentially the person becomes a stranger to self and to others, as well as to the larger historical processes.<sup>4</sup>

Erikson's research seems to indicate that in some young people, in some classes, at certain periods of history, the identity crisis is minimal. In other people, classes, and periods, this crisis is clearly marked off as a critical period. There is a great deal of evidence to suggest that in contemporary American culture, the identity crisis is of maximal importance. American youth feel a desperate urgency, often concealed under the camouflage of social conventions, to resolve the problem of what they are to believe in and who they are to become. But since a number of forces working in combinations have extended the period of adolescence, individuals may not experience the crisis until their twenty-fifth or even their thirtieth year.

### ***Situating Erikson's Research***

There have been different emphases in psychological theory throughout its brief history. Sigmund Freud, for example, introduced the will to pleasure through the study of sexuality. Alfred Adler has made contributions with the will to power as a main factor in the formation of neurosis. In the present, it seems as though the will to meaning is more dominant. Literature, drama, and art are

replete with the theme of personal identity. In his earliest volume, *Childhood and Society*, Erikson builds upon the Freudian foundations, elaborating the psychological dimensions of physiological relations with important objects of affection.<sup>5</sup> But he went much further than Freud.

Erikson shows through clinical observations, anthropological studies, and experimental play situations that human interactions are culture bound even as they yield to a presumably cross-culturally valid psychodynamic interpretation. So even though Erikson begins with the biological and psychological data furnished by Freud, he gives this data his own interpretation. Thus the *oral* stage (in which the sucking and eating instincts are developed) becomes the time in which the person faces the conflict between trust and mistrust. During the *anal* stage (in which control of the excretory functions is developed), the growing child is confronted with a challenge to balance autonomy and control with a sense of doubt and shame. The *genital* stage (in which children must learn to identify with parents of their own sex) becomes a conflict between initiative and guilt. The *latency* stage (which is not marked by the development of any particular biological function) is reinterpreted as a crisis in which the person must face the challenge of industry and overcome any feeling of inferiority or inadequacy.

In reinterpreting or extending the basic four stages developed by Freud, Erikson moves from the biological development of the person to the psychological development of the individual ego. His ego psychology focuses on the development of the individual's personal identity. For Erikson, the pattern of development through the life span is called *epigenesis*. This notion has its basis in the step-by-step physiological development of fetal organs. Each organ has its appointed time for emergence. If it does not arise at that time, it will never be able to express itself fully because the appointed time for some other part will have arrived; and this will tend to dominate the less active organ. Moreover, failure of one organ to fully develop tends to impair the whole developmental schedule and the hierarchy of organs. By analogy and extension of this physiological model Erikson has proposed that lifetime ego development follows an epigenetic schedule through eight major stages. Each phase is



characterized by a critical opposition in the sense of self and, as the phase passes, resolves the opposition with a dominance of one side over the other.

Each crisis is a step taken in the direction of the next and is a link in the chain of development. The solution of any one crisis is prepared for in previous phases and worked out to its completion only in subsequent ones. Erikson has described these phases in terms of their extremes of successful and unsuccessful solution:

- (1) basic trust versus mistrust (birth to 1+)
- (2) autonomy versus shame and doubt (2 to 3 years)
- (3) initiative versus guilt (4 to 6 years)
- (4) industry versus inferiority (school age)
- (5) identity versus identity diffusion (adolescence)
- (6) intimacy versus isolation (young adulthood)
- (7) generativity versus stagnation (middle adulthood)
- (8) integrity versus despair (older adulthood)

In his book *Identity and the Life Cycle* Erikson delineates these phases and suggests how their resolution contributes to healthy personality.<sup>6</sup> Each crisis in the developmental sequence involves a change in perspective. There must be a radical adjustment. For example, children fear separation from their mother in one phase of their development. At another stage of development this fear has vanished, and the children's greatest desire is to be independent. This is to say that they have faced the critical alternative between being a dependent creature and an autonomous one and have resolved it in favor of autonomy. Each crisis ideally is resolved in such a new adjustment. At each stage of its development, the ego comes up with a new sense of itself—that is, the individual senses the patterns of ego formation and tests these out in the social and cultural context of the environment. Each ego state has a kind of multidimensional equilibrium, which for all of its interrelatedness to physical, psychic, social, and cultural factors has a relatively stable autonomy of its own. Development in Erikson's scheme follows a conflict-resolution process throughout life. Unlike Freud, he stresses the identity crisis and generativity as much as or more than the early years of development.

### *The Process of Identity Formation*

According to Erikson, the fundamental problem of the youth stage is how one forms a wider, more all-embracing and inclusive identity. Self-esteem gradually grows into a conviction that the ego is capable of taking effective steps toward a tangible, collective future and that it is developing into a well-organized ego within a social reality. In a later work entitled *Identity, Youth, and Crisis*, Erikson calls this sense *ego identity*.<sup>7</sup> While he maintains that the identity crisis is the particular problem of young adults, its roots lie deeper—in a lifelong development that he calls the process of *identity formation*. These roots extend to the first instance of self-recognition that adolescents experienced as infants and develop throughout their childhood. However, the sense of ego identity is seriously threatened during adolescence.

Erikson claims that young people must become whole people in their own right, and the wholeness to be achieved at this stage he called a sense of inner identity. Young people, in order to experience wholeness, must feel a progressive continuity between what they have come to be during the long years of childhood and what they promise to become in the anticipated future—between what they conceive themselves to be and what they perceive others to see in them and to expect of them. Individually speaking, identity includes, but is more than, the sum of all the successive identifications of those earlier years when the children wanted to be, and often were forced to become, like the people they depended on.<sup>8</sup>

To put it another way, the integration now taking place in the form of ego identity is more than the sum of childhood identifications. It is the accrued experience of the ego's ability to integrate all identifications that are both positive and negative. Positive elements reflect those things that a person wants to become. On the other hand, negative elements mirror potential futures that are to be avoided. On a deeper level, they reflect a past that is to be lived down, a past that may mirror failures in competency and goodness which a person may have been made to feel guilty about, been shamed for, or been punished for.

So it can be said that, in a sense, adolescence is part of childhood and part of adulthood. Children identify with those particular as-



pects by which they are most immediately affected—the significant adults who touch their lives. By the end of adolescence these identifications merge and become subordinated to a single identity which includes all significant past identifications, but which also alters them to make a unique and coherent whole. Adolescent identity in its final development lacks the playfulness of infancy and the zest of childhood. There is a seriousness, an adult sense of purpose and direction.

In America cultural forces act to bring the adolescents to choose once and for all what their identity is to be. Such a task imposed by society is formidable, and in our culture it necessitates a long intermediate period of preparation. Erikson referred to such a period as a psychosocial moratorium during which individuals go to school to learn the technical and social requirements necessary for the professional situations to which they eventually will be committed.<sup>9</sup> Usually adolescents experiment during this time with various professional roles, looking for the ones they feel suited for. If it is found, they gain a sense of inner identity and continuity because the role allows them to bridge what they were as children and what they are about to become. It also allows them to reconcile their conception of themselves with that of society.

In general it is the inability to settle on an occupational identity which most disturbs young people. To keep themselves together, they temporarily overidentify with the heroes of cliques and crowds to the point of an apparently complete loss of individuality. Yet their search for something and somebody to be true to can be seen in a variety of pursuits more or less sanctioned by society. It is often hidden in a bewildering combination of shifting devotion and sudden perversity, as Erikson puts it, sometimes more devotedly perverse, sometimes more perversely devoted.<sup>10</sup> Yet in all youth's seeming shiftiness, a seeking after some durability in change can be detected.

Erikson gives several other characteristics of identity formation that should be mentioned here. For example, at this stage, not even "falling in love" is entirely or even primarily a sexual matter. To a considerable extent, adolescent love is an attempt to arrive at a definition of one's identity by projecting one's diffused self-image on

another and by seeing it thus reflected and gradually clarified. This is why so much of young love is conversation.<sup>11</sup>

Another frequent characteristic of this period is prejudice. Young people can become remarkably clannish, intolerant, and cruel in their exclusion of others who are different in skin color or cultural background, and often in entirely petty aspects of dress and gesture arbitrarily selected as the signs of insiders or outsiders. They persistently endeavor to define, overdefine, and redefine themselves and each other, in often ruthless comparison. The restless testing of the newest in possibilities and the oldest in values are also indicators of their search for reliable alignments.<sup>12</sup>

Erikson sees rebellion as another typical characteristic of adolescence. He suggests that it is the logical outcome of young people's attempt to resolve discontinuities and to find a personally authentic philosophy of life. This rebellious attitude is frequently accompanied by a period of idealism that causes them to reject the existing values of family, school, church, and society. Frequently they seek oversimplified and unrealistic solutions and/or ideals that are impractical and rarely held for any duration of time.<sup>13</sup>

Erikson maintains that when self-definition, for personal or for collective reasons, becomes too difficult, a sense of role confusion results. Young people counterpoint rather than synthesize their sexual, ethnic, occupational, and typological alternatives and are often driven to decide definitely and totally for one side or the other. On the other hand, when young people successfully define themselves, they experience an optimal sense of identity—that is, a sense of psychosocial well-being. This sense of identity is characterized by a feeling of being at home in one's body, of knowing where one is going, and an inner assuredness of anticipated recognition from those who count. It connotes the resiliency of maintaining essential patterns in the processes of change. Thus, strange as it may seem, it takes a well-established identity to tolerate radical change. The adolescent crisis of identity is resolved not by the child who was but by the adult who is to be.

When identity formation is relatively successful in youth, psychosocial development leads through the fulfillment of adult phases to a final integrity, the possession of a few principles which, though

gleaned from changing experience, yet prove unchangeable in essence. Erikson suggests that without old people in possession of such integrity, young people in need of an identity can neither rebel nor obey. He concludes that beyond childhood, which provides the moral basis of identity, and beyond the ideology of youth, only an adult ethic can guarantee to the next generation an equal chance to experience the full cycle of humanness. And this alone permits the individual to transcend personal identity—to become as truly individual as he ever will be, and as truly beyond all individuality.<sup>14</sup>

### Other Contributions

Since Erikson cited the crisis of adolescence as the attempt to achieve identity, there have been numerous others who have joined in the discussion. Lyman Coleman has developed strategies that are aimed at helping young people grow in their own sense of self-worth as well as in esteem for others.<sup>15</sup> Coleman maintains that through experiences in groups, individuals can discover new information about themselves and others—that is, their strengths and weaknesses. According to him, the air of honest, helping relationships in a group reflects God's own inner life and can become a supportive, healing, Spirit-filled communion. For Coleman, identity is as much determined by the community as by the individuals. Personal identity and self-understanding are relational and are built in the context of a person's association with a group or community.

Lawrence Kohlberg, whose main concern is moral development, has contributed much by way of his explanations of moral dilemmas. By a process similar to the one Erikson described, Kohlberg suggests that one phase of moral equilibrium breaks down when the complexity of moral crises becomes too great to manage with the present level of organization. Thus Kohlberg further rounds out Erikson's theory because he describes an integral task of identity formation—that of mature moral reasoning.<sup>16</sup>

John R. McCall has directly applied Erikson's schema to religious and value education. In his works, especially *Growing Up*, McCall describes the identity crisis in terms of everyday experiences that are directly related to religion and values.<sup>17</sup>

The implications of Erikson's work in identity for religious de-

velopment have also been explored by Barry McLaughlin.<sup>18</sup> He shows how Erikson in his treatment of Luther's life, *Young Man Luther*, proposes that all data—events, processes, actions, and personal relations—may have either or both a religious or a secular significance.<sup>19</sup> McLaughlin claims that though many may prefer to avoid assigning any particular religious dimension to these crises, Erikson points out that for a religious person like Luther, these events must have a deeply religious significance. He sees Erikson presenting Luther as achieving inner unity and integrity (identity) through his religious development. McLaughlin himself then proceeds to explicate these ideas even further, drawing out specific ramifications for religious life.

Although still in an embryonic stage, the work of James Fowler in faith development must also be mentioned here. A structural developmental theorist himself, Fowler's research centers around the inner structure of personal faith. He has identified six stages of faith-knowing that roughly correspond to Erikson's stages of psychosocial development. His third and fourth stages help clarify an important aspect of identity formation—that of the crisis of faith. By naming the specific tasks adolescents have to face with regard to faith-knowing, Fowler helps to focus on an area of development that is crucial to helping persons arrive at ego integrity.<sup>20</sup>

These are just a few theorists whose works have extended Erikson's interpretation of the identity crisis. Given the current scene, concern with the problems of youth will continue to increase; and with it there will surely be further attempts to elaborate Erikson's ideas.

### Implications for Working with Youth

Teachers, counselors, and ministers who deal with youth come to be significant representatives of that strategic act of recognition, the act through which society identifies and confirms its young members and thus contributes to their developing identity. As has been pointed out earlier, basic to the adolescent's struggle for identity is the need for a coherent philosophy of life. They are not old enough or experienced enough to formulate such a philosophy, but they feel compelled to make a beginning to do so. This need becomes more



intense under the conditions of a rapidly changing society in which many parents and teachers find it difficult to resolve conflicting values.

Adults working with children in church settings claim they want to teach the faith in such a way that children will appreciate it because they see its value in their lives. The hope is that in adolescence they will be able to discover it afresh for themselves, and it will become a central element in their lives. Negatively, these adults do not want to transmit the tradition to children in formal, dogmatic terms because they fear that in adolescence they may absorb it uncritically or have to go through a torturous process of rejection and realignment.

The church with its wisdom would like to be a significant factor in this crucial stage. But it finds itself with a new version of the problem. Adolescents have full mental capacity, so cognitive capacity is no longer the problem. Yet they have to deal with the depths of self-development and a range of social relationships at a time in life when they simply do not have the experience to make judgments that are needed. There is a social or experiential deficiency in dealing with the problems that are thrust upon them, and churches can help alleviate this deficiency.

### *Groups and Community*

Erikson's work clearly shows that one does not establish his identity in a vacuum, but in relationship with others—that is to say, within some form of community. For the adolescent, the group (that is, community with others) is a most apt vehicle for self-discovery and self-extension. Group is defined here as a gathering of more than one person united in spirit and acting for a common goal. Such a definition includes the notions of community and service. Although the members are united, it is not a static unity—they are all moving toward some common end.

In a group, even adolescent rebelliousness can be used to advantage. The questioning of values, customs, and conventions can allow adolescents to gain insight through instruction, information, and guidance into the reasonableness of their values. Values can then become personally meaningful because they will be fundamentally

rational. The idealism of this stage can aid this process because it can allow young people to accept challenges, and the supportive environment that the group provides allows them to be more secure in their quest.

It is helpful to note here that Jesus preached the good news first to his band of apostles. He worked within a small group; and once they had become a community, they were then sent by the Holy Spirit to serve all of humankind. What the apostles experienced then and what the church has experienced throughout all of its history must be experienced by its individual members.

If Jesus first worked with a small group and created a community before sending them out on their mission, youth workers cannot go wrong in imitating his example. The local church is the normal place where community can be created in full.

Because the creation of community teaches young people a new basis for identity—namely, the family of God—the church should use educational processes that are group-centered. Education is, of course, person-centered. But in American society it is generally used as a way for individuals to better themselves, and the motivation for learning and the reward system (grading) are individualistic. Perhaps little change can be made in the social system and in secular schools, but education under the control of the church could develop more processes that would help young people learn how to cooperate for group goals. Caring for each other should be a goal of church-related educational experiences.

### *Some Concluding Remarks*

There is much to be gleaned from Erikson's theory for work with youth in church settings. This fact is evident from the very nature of youth ministry as it is currently evolving. Youth ministry is concerned with the total person, and those working in it help young people face and cope with the mystery of themselves and others. Therefore, youth ministry is rooted in relationships—relationships to self, others, and God. This makes it a call to community. Youth ministers call young people to community by helping them reflect on, evaluate, and understand their relationship to their various communities. The youth worker is also a force for healing and



reconciliation within community experience. Youth ministry proceeds as an affirmation of gifts. The youth minister is sensitive to talents and personal gifts and tries to affirm them and nurture their development. Lastly, true ministry duplicates itself. Youth ministers encourage young people to minister to others by living out the church's mission to share the good news and by serving others in love and in justice.

All of the above characteristics are grounded in Erikson's principle of *epigenesis*. His exposition of the adolescent identity crisis can help focus the specific mission of church youth workers. Thus youth ministers would do well to undergird their goals with the insights of Erikson, who more than anyone has studied, defined, and explicated the identity crisis of youth and its ramifications for the broader community. These are especially important for the church, which by its nature ought to be an example of community.

### Notes

1. Kenneth Keniston, "Youth: a 'New' Stage of Life," *American Scholar* (Fall 1970), p. 332.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 332-333.
3. Ruth Benedict, "Continuities and Discontinuities in Cultural Conditioning," *Psychiatry* 1 (1938): 161-167.
4. Erik H. Erikson, "Youth: Fidelity and Diversity," *The Challenge of Youth*, ed. Erik Erikson (New York: Anchor Books, 1965), p. 23.
5. Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: W. W. Norton Co., 1964).
6. Erik H. Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle* (New York: International University Press, 1959).
7. Erik H. Erikson, *Identity, Youth, and Crisis* (New York: W. W. Norton Co., 1968), p. 49.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
9. Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle*, p. 111.
10. Erikson, *Identity, Youth, and Crisis*, pp. 235-236.
11. Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, p. 262.
12. Erikson, *Identity, Youth, and Crisis*, p. 87.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
15. For an example of Coleman's work, see his *Program for the National Serendipity Workshops* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Serendipity House, 1971).

16. For an introduction to Kohlberg's work, see his "Stage and Sequence: The Cognitive-Developmental Approach to Socialization," *Handbook of Socialization Theory and Research*, ed. David A. Goslin (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1969), pp. 347-480.
17. John R. McCall, *Growing Up* (New York: Paulist Press, 1972).
18. Barry McLaughlin, *Nature, Grace, and Religious Development* (New York: Paulist Press, 1964).
19. Erik H. Erikson, *Young Man Luther* (New York: W. W. Norton Co., 1958).
20. For a succinct presentation of Fowler's research, see his "Faith Development Theory and the Aims of Religious Socialization," *Emerging Issues in Religious Education*, ed. Gloria Durka and Joanmarie Smith (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), pp. 187-211.

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## Adolescents in the Family and Subculture

Robert E. Poerschke

### What's with Church Youth in the Family and in the Subculture?

If, as it is often described, the period of youth is the transition<sup>1</sup> between childhood and adulthood, then the passageway must be described as having at least two playing fields marked off on it. Often at least two games are going on in its boundaries. Imagine the Astrodome playing surface marked off with a football field and a baseball diamond and covered with at least twenty-two football players, eighteen baseball players, six umpires, and five referees! Youth feel compelled to be out there. They're not sure if it is baseball or football they want or ought to be playing, or if they might better try the role of the official. After such decisions are made, they still have to deal with the question of position.

As youth discover the wide variety of identity roles that they would like to claim and that are imposed upon them by others, their search for identity often becomes exceedingly frustrating. The frustration is probably most evident in adolescents' two most intimate areas of relationship—the family unit and the subculture. Here the youth are working their hardest to achieve identity, to accomplish self-determination, to become somebody. And precisely in these two areas parents, church leaders, ministers to youth, ministers of music, and pastors have the greatest opportunity to understand, provide support, keep resources and viable alternatives readily available, and encourage youth to work through their problems for themselves.

Father and Susan were in the kitchen talking about her allowance and other privileges. Mother, washing dishes, and younger sister, Doris, doing homework, were partly involved. Father tried to wrap up the conversation by saying, "So, Susan, if you want more privilege and freedom you have to earn it—you have to 'shape up'!

You have to 'be somebody'!" "Right!" said Mother. Susan's instant retort was, "But Daddy, I *am* somebody!" And Doris chimed in with, "Yeah!"

It is very important to study these "somebodies." Who is the somebody Father wants Susan to be? Is Mother thinking of the same somebody? Does Susan know either of these somebodies? If she does, would she care to be such a person? Who is the somebody Susan feels she *is*? What somebody does Doris see and affirm? Susan's friends, at school and church, would have their own comments to make about each of these somebodies, and especially about the somebody Susan insists she is.

Being or becoming somebody in their own eyes, in the eyes of parents and family, and especially in the eyes of friends, is the major developmental task of adolescents. Achieving emotional, psychological, and social maturity is "where it's at" for youth. Physical, mental, moral, and religious maturations are also taking place, but these areas are the subjects of other parts of this book. In this chapter we will be considering the personality growth part of becoming somebody as it is affected by and takes place in the family and the subculture (particularly the peer group).

The family was, in childhood, and may continue to be the more dominant factor of the two. The subculture is increasingly important and influential in the life of the youth. The family tends to reflect and emphasize the importance of the roles and relationships of childhood and continues to be supportive and affirming in matters of developing trust, autonomy, initiative, and industry.<sup>2</sup> The peer group, the subculture, the community, and the world are fields to explore and conquer. They provide challenge as well as opportunity for developmental growth in identity, intimacy, generativity, and integrity. The tasks of developing identity and intimacy are especially important to achieve during youth years.<sup>3</sup>

On the one hand, youth are determined to have all the security, support, and material advantage that they can claim from the family. These are routinely available to them in the home. On the other hand, youth show equal determination to have all the freedom for intimacy, exploration, productivity, and independence that they can claim from the peer group and subculture. These parallel demands

of youth bring to surface a tension of trust, acceptance, and communication that is deserving of serious attention at the least and capable of being destructively separating at worst. The family and the subculture are two major playing fields, superimposed upon each other, upon which youth develop themselves. The skills they will cultivate during their adult life are also formed on the larger playing fields of total culture.

If these arenas are important to youth, those who are seriously interested in ministering to youth will do well to understand and perceive in detail what goes on here. Such understanding will make it more possible to provide encouragement and support as well as resources to facilitate what is happening. It is important for leaders to stay out of the way and to allow youth the chance to try, to bomb out, and most of all to put it all together their own way.

### **Then What Goes On in the Home of the Church Youth?**

Parents in the homes of church youth have a variety of behavior patterns. Three sets of variables are frequently used to identify parental behavior: Rejectant-Acceptant; Autocratic-Democratic; and Indulgent.<sup>4</sup> The spectrum of these variables in parental behavior has been described as follows:

Actively rejectant

Nonchalant-rejectant

Casually autocratic

Casually indulgent

Acceptant-indulgent

Acceptant-casually indulgent

Acceptant-indulgent-democratic

Acceptant-democratic.<sup>5</sup>

Yet another set of variables deserving attention is the relative dominance of the father and mother in the home. The absence and/or presence of the two parents because of work, travel, or other reasons enters into this factor, along with the personality strength and inclination of each parent to want to control. Range of control, from Mother dominant to balanced control to Father dominant, coupled with quality of relationship (autocratic, laissez-faire, indul-



gent, democratic), suggests still another range of authority patterns in the home:

Mother-controlled—autocratic pattern of authority

Mother-led—democratic pattern of authority

Balanced control:

Equalitarian—democratic pattern of authority

Equalitarian—indulgent pattern of authority

Equalitarian—laissez-faire pattern of authority

Equalitarian—conflicting pattern of authority

Father-controlled—autocratic pattern of authority

Father-controlled—pseudo-autocratic pattern of authority

Father-led—democratic pattern of authority.<sup>6</sup>

The socioeconomic level of the home of the church youth is also of consequence. There is evidence to suggest that more often than not the home of the church youth will fall in the lower-middle-class to middle-class range. Upper-lower-class homes and upper-middle-class homes will also be represented frequently. Lower-class, lower-upper-class and upper-class homes will be least evident among church youth.

The youth in these homes must also be seen in variable groupings. At the obvious level they will be either female or male; and chronologically they will be in early, middle, or late adolescence. Many of the developmental characteristics of youth should be viewed in even greater detail and definition, for this is a time of many changes in a multitude of combinations. Orientation of developmental characteristics will be either toward childishness or toward adulthood. The eternal tension between achieving personal freedom and privilege while at the same time avoiding, so far as possible, the concomitant duty and responsibility, is the essence of the struggle in which the adolescent is involved. Change in the characteristics of youth may take place in any of the following areas: from dependent to independent; from acceptant to assertive; from lethargic to energetic; from passive to active; from irresponsible to responsible; from family oriented to extra-family oriented. Usually such changes begin in and, to a large degree, take place in the family; but they may also happen outside and beyond the family.

Much has been written about the individual problems youth deal with. The early adolescents are becoming grown-up persons physically. Height, weight, complexion, sexual development, strength, and agility are some of the individual problems with which early youth struggle. The middle adolescents are focused upon areas of psychological growth, such as personality, sexuality, and relationships. In older youth the problems are more nearly in the range of doing something with this grown-up body and this developing personality. Experimentation and coping with other persons (particularly the peer group, but progressively more and more with adults), new ideas, and exciting adventures and experiences claim the attention of youth in this period.

In all three periods of youth the underlying and basic struggle is with putting it all together, with making sense out of life. Youth are not always aware of what they are about. Church youth are rarely able or willing to name themselves philosophers or theologians. They are, however, involved in a desire to hook on to something solid. Self-determination includes the struggle to establish a capacity for devotion and loyalty to something bigger than themselves and even bigger than the family in which they have been formed. It is an effort to stop or at least slow down that part of the formative process that is from without and to emphasize that part that is from within. The family is still important in some degree; but now self, others, work, play, and some unifying force—a ground of being, a God—must have first attention. The youth seem to want to believe in something that will make it possible for them to believe in themselves!

This feeling of self-determination is enhanced or impaired by youth's sense of control or authority. One facet is control over physical and material environment (as opposed to being controlled by the environment). A second facet is control over other people (as opposed to being in the control of other people). Another facet is control over the time factor. The question of the future and its influence (positive or negative) upon the present also has bearing.

The nature of youth's struggles, the intensity of the struggles, and indeed whether or not the youth are even involved in specific struggles are highly dependent upon the family in which the youth

live. Far too few youth have available to them the best of family support, resources, and challenges. Homes in which parents are unable to resolve differences, in which parents act immaturely or are negligent or absent for whatever reason, and in which there is separation or divorce are quite obviously deterrents to youth's ability to put it all together. There is evidence that problems and struggles (especially as they involve relationship to other members of the family) are least frequent and severe in democratic homes; and they are progressively more frequent and severe in intermediate and authoritarian homes. There is some evidence to suggest that this progression is more evident among girls than boys.<sup>7</sup>

Generalizations are precarious. There can be no substitute for knowing the family background of each youth as a basis for understanding that youth. However, in situations where such individualized understanding is not possible, an overview and general understanding may have some value. Professional and managerial-class parents seem to provide greater opportunity for youth to achieve independence. Youth of such parents tend to discover, even as children, that they are of worth and have skills and abilities that will make it possible for them to control their environment. It is possible for them to feel that they need not necessarily feel inferior or subordinate to other people. For these youth the future holds promise; and preparation during youth for a job or career in the future is an acceptable and even desirable idea.<sup>8</sup>

Working-class parents tend to be more autocratic and rejectant. They are less likely to provide opportunity for their children to participate in the formation of their own lives and future. Physical punishment is evident in these families more frequently and at older age levels. Independent action and thinking is discouraged, and obedience and conformity are more often expected. Being or becoming somebody and putting it all together for youth in these families is in many instances more of a struggle and may even take on the form of a rebellion. The process of growth, then, is more likely to take place outside the home than within it.<sup>9</sup>

Neighborhoods, clusters of families, constitute a pattern of living, a general life-style, a subculture that has significant influence on the

individual families and, through them, on the youth who are members of these families. There is, however, another pattern of stratification that has even more influence on youth. It is the youth subculture, which develops as youth move out of family- and other adult-dominated places and gather in "youth places," such as public schools, youth centers, recreational establishments, and churches. Here in the youth subculture, individual youth are usually most comfortable and secure in working at being or becoming a somebody they can affirm.

### **And What Goes On in the Youth's Subculture?**

Interestingly, in the youth subculture, organization is again by family, though here they are described as gangs, cliques, groups, and crowds. In early adolescence the cliques are generally family sized and unisexual in nature. They tend to be neighborhood oriented, and conformity to the clique's standards and expectations is the primary prerequisite for membership. Leadership is casually selected by wide varieties of criteria (athletic skill, possession of money or a place to meet, assertiveness, and so forth). Still in early adolescence, these cliques begin to cluster. The larger family units, the crowds, that result are at first still unisexual in structure and are still from a relatively small neighborhood. However, interaction between crowds, and to some degree even between cliques, of opposite sexes begins.

In middle adolescence advanced individuals in these interacting crowds, as they become attracted to one another heterosexually, begin organizing overlapping and closely related heterosexual cliques. Soon, still in middle adolescence, these cliques enlarge to become heterosexual crowds. In such crowds, during late adolescence, as maturity in personhood and relationship is achieved, the security and support of the group become less important. Couple relationship becomes progressively more prevalent.

Though this description of group development during youth is brief and rather superficial, this period must, nevertheless, be viewed as one of major significance to youth. Youth who do not feel that they have a group of their own are generally very miserable people. Family does not adequately provide this sort of opportunity



to get freed up, to get away from adult (and especially parental) judgments and directives, and to feel genuinely wanted and accepted. Youth must have the chance to develop conversational techniques, to practice getting along with people, to improve social skills, and to try out relationships with the opposite sex without too much apparent danger of serious consequences. Gaining such opportunities without peer support and help seems to youth an impossibility. The peer group in the youth subculture may well seem to youth to be more important than family or church or school.

Parents and youth leaders who view the peer group objectively also see its values and importance. There is no better place than the youth group for the youth to learn the skills of interpersonal relationships between equals. Social adjustments are more frequently made in social situations than in classroom or academic learning experiences. Learning to relate by relating in an accepting surrounding is the better way. A basic part of this learning is the "untying of apron strings"—the moving from a parent-centered world to an other-centered way of life.

Especially important in this learning of relationships is the sexual and heterosexual aspect. The need to be aware of maleness and femaleness and then to practice being male or female with someone of the opposite sex is highly important. In our larger culture, where the family and the school often are overbalanced with female leadership, influence, and model, it is particularly helpful for boys to live in a group and culture in which there is challenge to be an adult male.

The peer group and the youth subculture also present problems to youth in their struggle to become somebody. While on the one hand it seems that they find freedom from the imposition of family and parents in their peer group, youth often also discover that they must now conform to the expectations of their group instead. The individualism and personhood they are seeking may be denied even more by their peers than it is by their parents.

The fact that peer groups are usually exclusive poses another set of problems. True, when a youth is accepted by a group, the acceptance and the status of being in are affirming and supportive. But there are always those who are not accepted. The frustration of

having rejectant parents or of needing peer affirmation must then be directed toward another group or another process for resolution. Even to the accepted youth, the exclusiveness of the peer group may be a handicap. If loyalty must be only to one group (as is often expected), and if relationships with other persons and groups are inhibited, youth's becoming process is forced to be narrow and restricted.

Status in groups and the membership of groups are rarely defined with clarity. The socioeconomic level of the family and neighborhood is often the primary criterion for membership. Upward mobility from these levels and membership in higher status groups are not frequent occurrences. Role concepts, interests, backgrounds, and activities seem more often to be the organizing forces than any choice or preference on the part of youth individually. Ethnic and racial features are strong forces in determining groups, so broadening and new experiences and relationships are apt to be beyond the grasp of individual youth. It is interesting to note, however, that athletic skill and maturity are often the exceptions that may allow a person to cross bridges and break through barriers in gaining admission to and leadership in peer groups.

### **Behavioral Problems in the Church Youth's Subculture**

Serious behavioral problems (especially in the use of automobiles, alcohol, drugs, and involvement in theft, violence, illegal sexual activities, and so forth) in youth's subculture are not formally identifiable until adolescents having them are actually caught in the act. Much evidence exists to suggest that only a very small percentage of youth (5 to 10 percent) having various problems are actually apprehended and convicted. Of even greater significance is the evidence that suggests that behavioral problems of youth are quite regularly a reflection of the behavioral problems of the youth culture and the larger culture in which their peer group and family are located.<sup>10</sup>

Statistics that compare only those who have been caught with those who have not been caught (but who may actually have been equally involved in the same behavioral problem) cannot provide an adequate base from which to deal with either those caught or not



caught. Only when we see the very close parallel in behavioral characteristics between youth and their peer groups with the behavioral characteristics of parents, the larger subculture, and the youth subculture of these same youth will we find ways to deal effectively with behavioral problems in church youth's subculture.

### **Then What Can Christian Parents and Church Leaders Do for Church Youth?**

Psychologically, the answer is to provide for youth the possibility of becoming somebody. The answer is not to provide for youth the chance to become the somebody we want them to be. We may, however, claim the right and must assume the responsibility of telling them about and modeling that somebody. Better still, the answer is that we must provide for youth the chance to become somebodies:

- who can accept themselves as they are.
- who are aware of their aptitudes and are willing to develop them to the highest possible level of skill.
- who are unafraid of work and able to enjoy to the fullest all wholesome play.
- who are aware of others and sensitive to the needs of others to become and be somebodies, too.
- who will claim for themselves and be committed to the task of providing for all other selves the chance to try, to fail, and to put it all together for themselves.

Theologically, Christian parents and church leaders can provide for youth the chance to become new persons in Christ—the somebodies God intends they become. *Note:* we can't make them be such persons. We can't push the idea in their ears or cram it down their throats. We only can give them the room, the freedom, the resources, and the chance to gain for themselves the knowledge, the understanding, and the commitment to be such persons as they discover God intends them to become!

### **And How Can Christian Parents and Church Leaders Pull This Off?**

This is the hard part! It is not as hard to know what to do as it is to be able to do it. Sociologically, the answer is simply to provide model communities (general subcultures, families, and the resultant

youth subcultures and peer groups) in which youth can experience becoming somebody in an encouraging, challenging, and affirming atmosphere. Subcultures, families, and churches must be available to youth in which parents and adults are authentic model somebodies with whom youth can work.

Theologically, the answer to pulling this off is in the often used and only faintly understood word *koinonia*. *Koinonia* is a relationship:

—that includes God himself, as counselor and guide though the direction of the Holy Spirit.

—in which all members are consciously seeking to know and to model after Jesus Christ, who is “the way, and the truth and the life.”

—that is committed to joining with God in revealing his searching, forgiving, affirming, blessing, reconciling love.

—and that warmly and genuinely welcomes and accepts every person.

Parents and church leaders must see to it that youth have available to them family *koinonia*, youth *koinonia*, congregational *koinonia*, and world *koinonia*. In such environments youth may experience becoming and being real, ultimate and eternally living as somebodies—“new persons in Christ.”<sup>11</sup>

## Notes

1. James S. Coleman, chairman, *Youth: Transition to Adulthood; Report of the Panel on Youth of the President's Science Advisory Committee* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974).

2. Terms describing developmental characteristics taken from Erik H. Erikson, *Identity, Youth, and Crisis* (New York: W. W. Norton Co., 1968).

3. Ibid.

4. Karl C. Garrison, *Psychology of Adolescence* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), p. 270.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid., p. 273.

7. Ibid., p. 275.

8. Arlyne Lazerson, ed., *Developmental Psychology Today* (Del Mar, Calif.: CRM Books, 1971), p. 385.

9. Ibid., p. 387.

10. Ibid., pp. 391-396.
11. Sara Little, *Youth, World, and Church* (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1968).

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## Cognitive Processes in Adolescence

G. Temp Sparkman

It is generally recognized that the adolescent is doing a higher kind of reasoning than the child. An old problem for the child—how a person can be in Atlanta and Georgia at the same time—is no longer one for the adolescent. Excitement in childhood about the adventure in the parable of the good Samaritan changes in adolescence to an interest in the meaning of the parable. When the syllogism “All boys are sissies; Jim is a boy; therefore, Jim is a sissy” is shown to a child he will respond to the primary premise by contending that not all boys are sissies. But the adolescent, even though believing the premise to be untrue, will be able to accept it in order to follow the logical operation involved in the syllogism.

The conversations, the books being read, the subjects being studied in school—all show a thinker advanced past childhood. The most influential theory back of this phenomenon is that of Jean Piaget. Piaget, born in 1896 in Neuchatel, Switzerland, is most generally called a psychologist, but genetic epistemology (or the development of knowledge) is his enduring interest. He is equally known as biologist, philosopher, and logician.

Although Harvard recognized him in 1936 with an honorary degree, Piaget's influence in America has come late. English translations of some of his works came in the 1940s, and in 1958 a significant one on adolescent thinking appeared. The major American interpretation came in 1963. Piaget's influence is now very much with us; and his work deserves serious attention.

The most complete work on Piaget's cognitive psychology is *The Developmental Psychology of Jean Piaget* by John H. Flavell (1963). This work is in three parts: “The Theory,” “The Experiments,” and “Critique.” The Foreword is by Piaget himself. Piaget writes that Flavell has successfully described and integrated his work. On the

other hand, Piaget says of the Critique section, "It is difficult for me to find them all convincing." <sup>1</sup>

Another important book is *The Origins of Intellect: Piaget's Theory* by John L. Phillips, Jr. (1975). This work outlines the periods of development put forth by Piaget and has a section on the educational implications of the theory. There is a helpful section on terminology and concepts utilized by Piaget.

One of the best brief treatments of Piaget's theory, and the one to read first, is *Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development* by Barry Wadsworth (1971).

There are, of course, other books by interpreters of Piaget besides Piaget's own works. Flavell and Phillips give complete bibliographies of Piaget's writings and of the translations and interpretations. The most significant English rendition of Piaget's own writings on adolescent development is found in *The Growth of Logical Thinking from Childhood to Adolescence* by Piaget and Barbel Inhelder, a longtime colleague of Piaget.

### Overview of Periods of Cognitive Development

The primary concern of Piaget's research is with how a person thinks. Thus it is thinking, not how much a person knows, that Piaget is studying and theorizing about. The research has revealed that thinking is related to age, hardly a surprising finding. But the significant aspect of the finding is its insight into the kinds of thinking being done at various stages of development. This means that in addition to knowing that a child does not reason as an adolescent, we now also have some reliable information about the ways in which that reasoning is different.

Four periods of cognitive development have been suggested from the research findings: Sensorimotor Period—Birth to Two Years; Preoperational Period—Two to Seven Years; Concrete Operations Period—Seven to Eleven Years; Formal Operations Period—Eleven to Fifteen Years. For this chapter on cognitive processes in adolescence, the period of most importance is that of formal operations. However, it will be helpful to summarize the other periods.

The sensorimotor period, birth to two years, is one of significant development—mental as well as physical. The physical growth can



be seen; the cognitive is more subtle. Piaget has found in these two brief years several stages of development. The best discussions of these findings are in Flavell and Phillips. During this period the child moves from reflex actions to deliberate actions. Instead of merely responding to the environment, he begins to take the initiative in experimenting with the environment. The child learns that objects are permanent and distinct from the self, that these objects exist even when unseen.

The preoperational period, two to seven years, does not leave motor development behind; rather, it builds upon it. The child moves from self-centered activity to genuine social activity. This is reflected, toward the end of the period, in the ability to play with and not just alongside others and in the child's language, which is now more dialogical and meaningful. However, thinking during this period is very limited. The child has difficulty taking the viewpoint of others, making real conversation difficult. He is erratic in behavior because of an inability to balance between current behavior and external interests. He has distorted perceptions because of being distracted by a single detail of an event.

The concrete operations period, seven to eleven years, is one of marked growth. The child can easily take the viewpoint of others and is thus a more social, cooperative person. A new kind of logical ability is perceived now that the child can reverse thought, as seen in the mathematic problem  $7 + 3 = 10$ ,  $10 - \text{---} = 7$ . This development also makes it possible for the child to perceive that water, when poured from one container to another of different size or shape, retains its original quantity—an insight that the preoperational child does not exhibit. The child in this period is still very much tied to operations in the concrete and is not yet capable of abstract reasoning, though he is grasping for such abstract ability; but the observer will note that this reasoning is still closely wed to the actual and begins there rather than in the potential.

Further elaborations and examples of thinking in these first three periods will be a part of the discussion of the final period, formal operations, for it is not possible to talk of the advanced nature of cognitive development in adolescence without talking of the kind of thinking over which adolescent thinking is advanced.

### Adolescent Reasoning: Formal Operations

To operate on something is to apply tools and techniques to that something. We know from medical surgery what it means to operate on someone. Operations in thought, then, are the cognitive tools and techniques we use in thinking. The reason these operations are called formal is that they assume a form that goes beyond the thought of the child, which is concrete bound and without deliberate form. It is similar to the difference in *education* and *formal education*.

"The adolescent," by Flavell's interpretation, "performs these first-order operations, too, but he does something else besides, a necessary something which is precisely what renders his thought formal rather than concrete. He takes the results of these concrete operations, casts them in the form of propositions, and then proceeds to operate further upon them, i.e., make various kinds of logical connections between them. Formal operations, then, are really operations performed upon the results of prior (concrete) operations." <sup>2</sup>

The first characteristic of formal thought, then, is that it is propositional. Children, although they often wonder about possibilities and the unknown, deal primarily with what is. And while they apply a certain logic to matters, they do not exhibit a formal approach. The formal thinker, according to Sund, "may express a series of hypotheses in propositional form and reason as follows: "It is this or that./It is this and that./It is this but not that./It is neither this nor that." <sup>3</sup> You can see immediately that the ability to deal with possibilities by the making of propositions greatly expands one's world. It is necessary for systematic and scientific thinking.

One of several experiments illustrates this kind of thinking. There is a billiard table with targets placed in various positions. Instead of one's using a stick that can be carried and moved, the table has a screwed-down tubular plunger with a spring in it. The plunger can be turned to get different angles from the shots of the ball. The participant is asked to try to hit the various targets by angling the shots off one wall of the table. As the activity proceeds, the experimenter asks questions about why one target was hit and another target missed. Or the experimenter asks where the plunger would

need to be aimed to hit another target.

KAR (Age 9 years, 6 months) "The more I move the plunger this way (to the left), the more the ball will go like that (extremely acute angle), and the more I put it like this (inclined to the right), the more the ball will go like that" (increasingly obtuse angle). KAR reaches the point of discovering that the ball returns to the starting point when the plunger is "straight," i.e., perpendicular to the rebound wall.<sup>4</sup>

LAM (Age 15 years, 2 months) "The rebound depends on the inclination (of the plunger), . . . Yes, it depends on the angle. I trace an imaginary line perpendicular (to the buffer): the angle formed by the target and the angle formed by the plunger with the imaginary line will be the same."<sup>5</sup>

The two responses above are not all that different on the surface. Other, more divergent examples could have been chosen, but the similarity of these illustrates the point of formal thinking. KAR discovered the same things as LAM, but LAM was able to submit the experiment to analysis and form hypotheses about it.

An important point made here is that the formal thinker performs these systematic operations mentally, whereas the child's operations are concrete bound. This is why logic-syllogisms are difficult for the child. Particulars of the real situation prevent the child from accepting the assumption in the first premise. Adolescent reasoning, on the other hand, can accept assumptions in order to pursue an argument. This ability is a cornerstone of mature reasoning.

Also involved here is the ability of system or theory-building. Inhelder elaborates: "The child does not build systems. His spontaneous thinking may be more or less systematic (at first only to a small degree, later, much more so); but it is the observer who sees the system from the outside, while the child is not aware of it since he never thinks about his own thought . . . . In other words, the child has no power of reflection, i.e., no second-order thoughts which deal critically with his own thinking. No theory can be built without such reflection."<sup>6</sup>

Scientific studies and humanities subjects are examples of second-order thinking in that adolescents can imagine scientific systems and evaluate them and can assume positions on matters of concern to humanity, such as the problems of evil, suffering, and so

forth, and reflect on those thoughts. The scientist, philosopher, theologian, and intellectual social reformer, exemplify this ability in a highly advanced state.

This new reasoning ability leads to a recurrence of a limitation on thinking that showed up in the preoperational period. This limitation is labeled *egocentrism* and refers to the inability of the child to take another's viewpoint. It is a hindrance to socialization during the preschool years. And now in adolescence it retards the full development of reasoning power.

In its new form, however, it is cognitive or idealistic egocentrism. It comes out of an overconfidence in the systems or theories that the adolescent has devised, a belief that because something is possible it is real. You have seen young people who have become engaged by a religion or movement of some kind and who believe that new thing to be beyond error. There is a kind of blind loyalty to the ideology or the ritual. This makes it difficult to entertain competing ideologies or movements. One of the causes of this new egocentrism is at the same time one of the positive factors in the development of adolescent reasoning, according to Inhelder and Piaget. They believe that in the anticipation of adult roles, "the adolescent's egocentrism comes out in a sort of Messianic form such that the theories used to represent the world center on the role of the reformer that the adolescent feels himself called upon to play in the future."<sup>7</sup> This is not believed to be a deliberate egotism, but a genuine part of cognitive development—a part responsive to the new situation in which the adolescent is found.

In normal development, cognitive egocentrism eventually breaks down, just as did its counterpart in early childhood. The more the adolescent converses with others, the sooner this egocentrism begins to dissipate. Ideas, as they are tested in dialogue with peers, parents, and others, undergo some scrutiny and a certain amount of alteration.

Inhelder and Piaget say that while these social relations help in overcoming cognitive egocentrism, the final blow comes when adolescents enter the real world of work. At that time what seems possible is tested against what actually is, and adaptations are made. This is not to suggest that the adolescent does all of the giving in, for



that would not be true or desirable. It is just such clashes between the ideal and the actual that militate against the status quo and lead to progress.

Thus egocentricism is not to be viewed as a negative force or equated with egotism. It is a necessary step in full, reasoning maturity. It does have an early crippling effect on thinking; but it is soon overcome, and its residue can be very positive.

This ability of second-order reasoning enables the adolescent to store thoughts and then to retrieve them for the solution of a problem. Sund refers to this ability as reflexive thinking and suggests that it is done by scientists and writers who think back over their work as they are completing it. One of the best illustrations of reflexive thinking is in the solution of the problem "Bob is fairer than John; John is darker than Bruce; who is the darkest of the three?"

Second-order thinking also changes a person's historical perspective. The past is now longer, and persons and events in history are put into better order. The formal thinker—with experience, of course—begins to differentiate between what happened in Old and New Testament times and to see that because of certain events Abraham is before David, David before Jesus, and so on. The formal thinker also begins to take note of historical parallels, such as that Martin Luther nailed his theses to the Wittenburg Cathedral door before there was a United States. The fact of infinity, backward and forward, while never understood, is at least a major part of the consciousness of the formal thinker.

Implied throughout this discussion is that the adolescent is no longer bound by the *content* of a problem but can now deal with its *form*. This was seen in the mastery of the syllogism in logic. It also can be seen in a new ability to understand allegory or parable. A child allows the details of a parable to obscure getting at the meaning behind the details, whereas the formal operational thinker, free of the content, can perceive the meaning.

To the concrete thinker the Exodus in De Mille's *The Ten Commandments* is a high adventure in which the good guys got away, albeit with some unusual assistance. The formal thinker sees beyond the adventure to the meaning of the deliverance and even integrates



this into a larger picture or system of belief as to how God deals with his creation. The details do not become insignificant; rather, they are dealt with as parts of a whole, but are not allowed to replace the emphasis that the whole has inherent within it.

### The Origin of Formal Structure

Now that we have seen what characterizes adolescent thought, we can deal briefly with what must be a question all of us have asked after reading such descriptions. The question is that of origin: Where do these structures come from?

Inhelder and Piaget present the best discussion of this question, and the inquirer is referred to their book for a more detailed examination. They admit that formal thinking waits upon puberty, but then quickly discount it as an explanation for the new advance in thinking. Rather, they contend, formal operational thought depends upon two developments: the anticipation of adult roles and the maturation of the nervous system. The exact linkage with the nervous system, which includes cerebral development, cannot be specified. But it is certain that this maturation within the individual, plus the influence of the social dimension through the anticipation of taking up adult roles, are the chief ingredients in the origin of formal structures.

Inhelder and Piaget ascribe three elements to the key concept of the *adult role*. One, the adolescent, although still very much attached to childhood, assumes an equal status with adults. Parents of teenagers have seen their children suddenly become their judges, often to an irritating degree. Two, a *life program* becomes important to the adolescent; the future and the adolescent's place in it becomes a concern. Three, the adolescent entertains and may develop plans for changing the society, either a small segment of it or the whole of it.<sup>8</sup>

Cerebral development sets the limits of formal thought. That is to say, until this development occurs, the person cannot perform formal operations. However, this potential for formal operational thinking is not realized apart from environmental factors. The adult role anticipation is the primal factor involved. Thus, while this advanced kind of reasoning is possible in adolescence, it is not

realized automatically. Perhaps this answers another question that many have about Piaget's theory: "If Piaget is right, why do so many adults still reason at lower levels, especially where religion is concerned?"

The following observation sums up this interplay between individual givens and social influences: "Formal structures are neither innate *a priori* forms of intelligence which are inscribed in advance in the nervous system, nor are they collective representations which exist ready-made outside and above the individual. Instead, they are forms of equilibrium which gradually settle on the system of exchanges between individuals and the physical milieu and on the system of exchange between individuals themselves." <sup>9</sup>

The word *equilibrium* denotes a state of cognitive balance and has behind it the key concepts in Piaget's theory. To complete our understanding of the origin of formal structures, we will now examine these concepts: *function*: adaptation, assimilation, accommodation, and equilibrium; *structure*: schema.

*Function* refers to what is happening when we are thinking. Piaget suggests that as we confront a new experience, we go through a process of adaptation and organization.

First, let us look at adaptation. Adaptation involves changing the way we behaved before. It also involves an alteration in the experience itself. Thus both our behavior and the experience are changed in some way and in differing degrees.

When, in the face of new experience, behavior, or thought we work the new into existing behavior, we are assimilating, according to Piaget. We are, in such cases, adapting the environment to our own way of doing things. An example of this concept is children at play. While the children are doing a certain amount of imitating of adults or an adult environment, they are actually recreating the situation to fit their own abilities. Watch young children playing school, and you will see assimilation working. The children are taking what they perceive from the actual school situation (the teacher's demeanor, assignments, chalkboard activity, and books) and dealing with these perceptions within their own capacities.

When, in the face of a new experience, behavior, or thought we do most of the changing, we are accommodating, Piaget says. Ac-

commodation refers to bringing into our way of behaving whatever new thing is presented to us. When we imitate others, we are accommodating to their way of acting or thinking, with only slight changes. An actor, though possessing a unique style, accommodates to the role that the script calls for. When young children show a marked, seemingly new behavior, they have accommodated to the extent that former ways of doing are no longer adequate.

While assimilation and accommodation can be separated for purposes of discussion, in actuality they cannot be so neatly distinguished. Together they form a complex of give and take, of reception and integration, which adds up to an adaptation of behavior. As this interplay takes place, we develop new behaviors, concepts, values, and attitudes.

We attain the equilibrium mentioned earlier by Inhelder and Piaget. This equilibrium is essentially a state of cognitive balance, when the conflicts of change required by the environment and by the strength of the individual are resolved. Phillips writes that this is a dynamic rather than a static balance. "It is a system of compensating actions that maintain a steady state . . . a condition of the system in which the internal actions of the organism completely compensate for intrusions from without."<sup>10</sup> Wadsworth defines equilibrium as "a balance between assimilation and accommodation. Disequilibrium is an imbalance between assimilation and accommodation."<sup>11</sup>

This interplay between assimilation and accommodation brings us to the second aspect of the function of development, *organization*. Thus we have adaptation and organization as the descriptions of the developmental function. That is to say, it is through adaptation (assimilation and accommodation) and organization that we develop cognitive structures.

The introduction of the concept of organization is simply to note that as we adapt to our environment, we do so from some kind of position or condition. The adaptation cannot take place in a vacuum. That aspect of adaptation called assimilation assumes that there is already something within us to which something else is being assimilated. Like the process of adaptation, organization is inevitable.

From biology, an analogy of organization is the digestive system. Although the state of that system will vary from time to time as we grow, it remains relatively unchanged as a system. Analogies from the cognitive area are not found so easily. However, the matter is somewhat clarified by Flavell: "All intellectual organizations can be conceived of as totalities, systems of relationships among elements . . . . An act of intelligence, be it crude motor movement in infancy or a complex and abstract judgment in adulthood, is always related to a system or totality of such acts of which it is a part." <sup>12</sup>

We have been discussing adaptation and organization. These are what are known as nonvarying developmental functions. While these do not vary with age, there is an important part of Piaget's theory that does provide a changing dimension with increasing age. It is called structure.

*Structure* represents levels of cognitive ability or levels of thinking. Structure is not content. It is not specifically what we think or do. Rather, it is how we think or behave. In the beginning of this chapter we referred to the fact that adolescents no longer have difficulty with the fact that Atlanta is in Georgia and that a person can be in both at the same time, whereas children cannot quite understand that. The reason for the gap in understanding is one of cognitive structure.

Probably the key element of cognitive structure is Piaget's notion of the *schema*. Flavell writes of the difficulty of defining a schema, a situation due partly to the fact that Piaget himself nowhere makes a definitive statement about it. Flavell, however, attempts a definition: "A schema is a cognitive structure which has reference to a class of similar action sequences, these sequences of necessity being strong, bounded totalities in which the constituent behavioral elements are tightly interrelated." <sup>13</sup> And in another place: "A schema is a kind of concept, category, or underlying strategy which subsumes a whole collection of distinct but similar action sequences." <sup>14</sup>

The student who is interested in more precision on the meaning of schema and the distinction between schema and organization is referred to the books mentioned at the beginning of the chapter.



Further readings in these books will give more detailed information.

### **Credibility of Piaget's Theory**

Some persons have approached Piaget's theory with a kind of cognitive egocentrism, having become infatuated with the theory on first reading but not bothering to ask critical questions or to read criticisms of the theory. Of course, the theory ought to be read first without undue critical thought, with the attempt being to understand what Piaget and his interpreters are saying. Then should come the reading of Piaget's critics.

Piaget has been evaluated at several points: the experimental sampling, the experimental techniques, the reporting of the findings, and the postulating from the data. Flavell devotes considerable space to a critique of Piaget, much of which is technical and beyond the interest of most of us, who can utilize Piaget without getting into such high-level questions.

Sund and others, adding to Flavell's body of evaluation, report on research that both corroborates and challenges Piaget. Sund, for example, reports on a David Elkind study which found among 469 junior and senior high school students many who were unable to do formal operational thinking in reference to quantity and volume. Sund also reports a John W. Renner study of 588 junior and senior high students' ability to deal with conversion of a solid, weight, volume and some other tasks. Renner suggested that there is a kind of transitional stage, what he labeled "Post-Concrete-Operational," ranging from twelve to thirteen years, with formal thinking coming in the fourteen- to seventeen-year range.<sup>15</sup>

Of special interest to religious educators are the experiments and studies of Ronald Goldman, John Peatling, and others, discussed in the chapter on religious thinking (chapter 4).

### **Implications for Youth Education**

Piaget did not concern himself with a theory of education. However, his theory of cognitive development has several implications for education. As far as religious education is concerned, Piaget's work has application to curriculum materials and to teaching ap-



proaches. Curriculum materials for youth can take advantage of the developing ability of youth to do formal thinking. In fact, some youth are already applying new intellectual tools to religious doctrine and are raising challenging questions.

Then there is the matter of teaching technique. Piaget's findings affirm the wisdom of educators who have called for dialogue in teaching rather than teacher-dominated instruction. As we discover how as well as what a student is thinking, we can be of greater help to the youth.

If Inhelder and Piaget are right about the influence of the anticipation of adult roles, does this not mean that mature adults will need to be placed with our youth? And does not this also mean that adequate vocational guidance is critical? In addition, this influence of mature adults calls for youth to be involved with the whole church community in worship and other activities rather than being isolated in their own interests and activities.

Chapter 4 of this book is really an extension of this chapter on Piaget, for it deals with the thinking of youth when religious materials are being utilized. It represents the most direct application of Piaget to religious education. Chapter 7 applies the theory to the affirmation of faith. The theory is related to Kohlberg's work as reported in chapter 5.

## Notes

1. John H. Flavell, *The Developmental Psychology of Jean Piaget* (New York: D. Van Nostrand Co., 1963), p. 4iii.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 205.
3. Robert B. Sund, *Piaget for Educators* (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Co., 1976), p. 50.
4. Jean Piaget and Barbel Inhelder, *The Growth of Logical Thinking from Childhood to Adolescence*, trans. by Anne Parsons and Stanley Milgram (New York: Basic Books, 1958), p. 8.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 339-340.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 343.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 339.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 338.
10. John L. Phillips, Jr., *The Origins of Intellect: Piaget's Theory* (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman and Co., 1975), pp. 14-15.
11. Barry J. Wadsworth, *Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development* (New York: David McKay Co., 1971), p. 18.

12. Flavell, p. 47.      13. Ibid., p. 53.  
 14. Ibid., p. 54.      15. Sund, p. 75 ff.

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- \*These works contain complete bibliographies on Piaget.

## 4

# Religious Thinking in Adolescence

John H. Peatling

The topic of this chapter involves two very complex words: *religious* and *thinking*. To understand what the term *religious thinking* might mean calls for a small amount of logic, just as to know what it has meant during the 1960s and 1970s requires some historical information.

It can be said that *religious* and *thinking* have three and only three relationships. First, they can be equivalent. Second, they can be distinctly different from each other. Third, they can share something in common.

If readers will recall the set theory they learned long ago in elementary school, they will be able to visualize three sets of circles. First, the circles overlap so much that the set looks just like one circle (A equals B). Second, the circles do not overlap at all (A does not equal B). Third, one set exhibits an overlap, but some of each circle is outside the overlap. (Some is A and not B; some is B and not A; and some is both A and B.)

Therefore, one of the first things that must be said about religious thinking is that it has not been used to affirm that thinking and the religious are synonyms. Neither has it been used to affirm that thinking and the religious are separate and unrelated. Rather, it has been used to affirm that the terms exhibit some overlap. What is beginning to be suggested in the late 1970s is that conceptual clarity requires yet further distinctions within this one-of-three possible relations.<sup>1</sup>

The discussion up to now should help us to avoid some wrongheaded notions. Religious thinking has never affirmed that religion (or the religious life) is simply a matter of thinking. Whatever religion may be, there is some overplus that is not thinking. Similarly, whatever thinking may be, there is something about it

that is not religion. This, of course, does not mean that thinking is nonreligious or antireligious, but simply that it is areligious. The study of religious thinking, then, is both a religious endeavor and an endeavor that involves categories, ideas, methods, and procedures that are other than religious.

However, while the otherness of both terms is a necessary affirmation, that must not blind a religious person to the fundamentally positive affirmation that thinking and the religious are related via intersection. (In the union of A and B there is some which is both A and B.) There is some thinking that is applied to, used in the service of, or is a part of whatever we call religion or the religious. Therefore, religious thinking is a way of addressing some but not all of the reality of the religious life known experientially to many, many persons. It can help one understand not only others but also something of his own self. Most particularly, a study of religious thinking can help one be realistic about what seems to be involved in the lengthy process of growing a human being. It can help us see that this human being is capable of becoming a religious person but does not always become one.

This may be enough conceptual mapping to enable a reader to sense the importance of the topic as well as to recognize that there are some inevitable limitations to it. Salvation does not occur through cognition; for Christians, it comes through faith in Jesus the Christ as an evidence of God's love for all humankind. Still, those who have a saving faith find, as generations before them have found, that, out of either near despair or celebratory joy, they tend to think about their religious beliefs.

One expression of that tendency to think is theology. Another is what came to be known during the 1960s and 1970s as the study of religious thinking. However, theology and the study of religious thinking are different enterprises. Both share logic as a basic tool. But the study of religious thinking requires research. And up to the early part of 1977 it had generated much empirical research. Its conceptual roots are in developmental psychology and in Jean Piaget's study of how we come to know (what he called genetic epistemology).

Although theologians might blanch at the thought (and psycholo-

gists might not be too happy with it either!), religious thinking may be regarded as the empirical underside to the theological coin. If religious thinking is the empirical flip side of theology, its generality means that it does not demand adherence to a particular theology. It is useful with theological positions that can range from the conservative to the liberal. Thus, no religious person should fear the study of religious thinking.

Maximally, if God's grace abounds, such a study can lead to no more surprising state than the Johannine Christ suggests when he promises to lead us "into all the truth" (John 16:13, RSV). Minimally, such a study can lead to no more than a state sages have pointed toward with the advice to know ourselves. Hopefully, this exposition of religious thinking will occupy some intermediate ground, although the author would be remarkably rewarded if the Johannine promise should prove to be moved forward by anything that he has written.

### Religious Thinking: What It Has Meant

As near as the author knows, the words religious thinking were first put together by Ronald J. Goldman sometime in the very early 1960s. At that time, Goldman was working on a doctorate in psychology at the University of Birmingham in the United Kingdom. His doctoral adviser, Professor E. A. Peel, encouraged Goldman to apply Piaget's work to the problem of the religious development of children and adolescents. This he did.

The results of his doing that led not only to his doctoral degree in 1962 but also to two books and a surprisingly long-lasting effect upon religious education in the United Kingdom. In many ways, there is no better way to understand Goldman than to read his books. *Religious Thinking from Childhood to Adolescence* (1964) is based solidly upon his 1962 dissertation.<sup>2</sup> *Readiness for Religion* (1965) is an extended venture in inferring educational practice from the results of his doctoral research.<sup>3</sup> Although one can now regard both works as quite germinal, honesty and friendship impel the author to acknowledge a considerable intellectual debt to Goldman.

Goldman was remarkably clear about what he was doing. He specifically said that he was interested in studying the effect of the



development of thinking upon a series of topics of presumed religious value. As he wrote in *Religious Thinking from Childhood to Adolescence*, he used the compound religious thinking as “a shortened form of expressing the activity of thinking directed toward religion, not a term meaning a separate rationality” (RTFCTA, p. 4).<sup>4</sup> He was interested in thinking *per se* and, particularly, thinking “directed toward religion” (that is, the intersection of thinking and the religious). As a psychologist, Goldman’s interest was in what is called cognition. As a Piagetian, he was interested in cognitive development through a sequence of stages identified by Jean Piaget. As one concerned for the intersection of thinking and the religious, he was concerned with how cognitive development affected an individual’s understanding of religion. As both an educator and an educational psychologist, he was particularly interested in how thinking’s intersection with the religious affected a student’s understanding of religion in the religious education classes which, in the United Kingdom, were organized around a locally agreed syllabus.

When Goldman began his research, those agreed syllabi were heavily weighted in favor of a sequential study of the Bible, with only minimal attention to whether the students could understand the material. In addition, the schools had a state mandate to include a worship service in the school day, so he was also interested in the students’ understanding of worship, prayer, and the Scripture passages used in those services.<sup>5</sup>

Goldman undertook a careful investigation of his topic. He stayed close to the method Piaget had used in his early studies, a rigorous procedure called a clinical interview. He developed three projective pictures and a series of standard questions about them. He also developed a series of standard questions about three biblical stories, which challenged students to think about their meaning. The three miracle stories are Moses and the burning bush, the crossing of the Red Sea, and the temptation of Jesus by the devil.<sup>6</sup> Goldman constructed a stratified representative sample of two hundred students in ten age levels: he had ten boys and ten girls in each age level from six years of age through fifteen years of age. He interviewed each student in his sample and reported that each interview

took about eighty minutes.

Goldman methodology has been appreciatively reviewed by North American psychologists and, minimally, should be regarded as an excellent example of a clinical interview.<sup>7</sup> For technical reasons, although many questions were asked, Goldman's developmental analysis of the effect of Piagetian levels of thinking upon students' religious understandings made use of responses to only five questions. Three questions concerned the story of Moses and the burning bush; one question concerned the story of the crossing of the Red Sea; and one question concerned the story of Jesus' temptation by the devil.<sup>8</sup> Goldman was quite open: "They were chosen because the discussion of each question with each child revealed the possibilities of checking the child's mode of thinking by Piagetian methods" (RTFCTA, p. 51). The result of his analysis was that he found evidence to substantiate Piaget's position that "there is a continuum of thinking which follows an 'operational' sequence" (RTFCTA, p. 62).

While Goldman clearly specified that different children would move along Piaget's continuum of thinking at different rates, he also identified evidence for three of Piaget's four periods: a so-called *pre-operational* (or intuitive) stage, a so-called *concrete operational* stage, and a so-called *formal or abstract operational* stage. (The sensorimotor period was not studied.) Goldman suggested that mental age was the best indicator of when a child was likely to achieve thinking at one or another of these three stages. He found that the children who were interviewed achieved the concrete operational stage of thinking between six years six months and eight years ten months of mental age. The achievement of the formal or abstract operational stage did not come until between thirteen years five months and fourteen years two months of mental age. As he recognized, this later "boundary" is much later than Piaget had reported for his studies of Swiss children.

In *Readiness for Religion* (1965) Goldman ventured a usefully daring summary of his research by presenting a three-step diagram of a sequence of religious thinking (RFR, p. 196). He equated the level of pre-operational thinking with what he called pre-religious thought. He called the level of concrete operational thinking sub-

religious thought. He suggested that only the level of late concrete operational thinking and the level of formal or abstract operational thinking deserved to be called personal religious thought. In many ways, since that diagram was first published in 1965, those three terms have generated far more heat than light.

Religious educators have been particularly challenged by the idea that children were *not* religious thinkers until as late as eleven years of age. However, by 1977, one should be able to recognize that regardless of the labels one may choose to attach to the various stages in a Piagetian continuum of cognitive abilities, the research (Goldman's and that of the author and his colleagues) lends support to the fact that cognitive level and religion interact in a describable, discernible way to affect one's understanding of religion, its practices, and its scriptures. If one can understand that, it may be possible to let Goldman's 1965 phrases stand as simple clues (or even as hypotheses!) to a reality that the religiously committed person doing education must recognize and, then, work with. Those clues are both a limitation and a challenge. Without killing hope, they require rigor!

One of the influential suggestions that Goldman made in *Readiness for Religion* was that a formal, structured religious education curriculum should not begin until between seven and nine years of age and, then, should start with what he called life themes (RFR, pp. 110–111). As an educator, Goldman was concerned with building a conceptual base for the obviously religious topics in such a curriculum. So he suggested postponing either the rigor or the sequence of a normal academic study of religious history, fact, or theology until well into adolescence (that is, until formal or abstract operational thinking was more likely). Implicitly, he allowed one to infer that much of what had been tried with younger children was really the challenging stuff of adolescent and adult religious education. Although not everyone will agree with Goldman, we must admit that those suggestions are clearly no more than (a) the informed insights of a researcher working out from his study in the early 1960s or (b) the considered judgment of a trained educator acutely aware of the cognitive development of children and adolescents. Fifteen years after Goldman's dissertation was accepted at the

University of Birmingham, religious educators have more research data available than they did; and the implications for adolescents are becoming clearer and clearer. Moreover, much of that subsequent research has been done by the author and his colleagues in the United States with student populations five to fifteen times the size of Goldman's original study of two hundred children in the United Kingdom.

### Religious Thinking: What It Now Means

In the same year in which *Religious Thinking from Childhood to Adolescence* was published (1964), the author brought Goldman to the department of Christian education of the Episcopal church for a one-day consultation. Thus began a relation that lasted across the 1960s and into the 1970s. At Goldman's suggestion, the author and his co-workers in the department of Christian education began the lengthy and expensive process of initiating a North American replication of Goldman's study with a large, representative sample of children and adolescents. The desire to study a large sample of students in the United States of America, in itself, led to the translation of Goldman's clinical interview schedule into a paper-and-pencil test that could be administered locally. Even in the affluent society, no one could imagine sending highly trained interviewers all over the United States. Also, it became increasingly evident that, if one were to deal with large numbers of responses, it was imperative to shift from coded records of interviews to pretest criterion-referenced records. Finally, while Goldman's work indicated that the projective pictures were a rich source of information, they did not speak directly to the question of religious thinking with anything like the precision of the questions and responses associated with the three biblical miracle stories. Essentially, what happened during the mid-1960s was that religious thinking became operationally defined so as to be useful in additional research.

Religious thinking itself was explicitly recognized to be shorthand for the effect of the Piagetian sequence of levels of thinking upon how one thought about the religious. Further, consideration of Piaget's own work made it clear that any stage of thinking was a dominant tendency, not an all-or-nothing affair! It was also evident



that both the rate of movement through the Piagetian sequence and the level of achievement varied from person to person and from subject matter to subject matter. Goldman himself had suggested that the sheer complexity of religious language accounted for much of the chronological lag in achieving formal or abstract operational thinking directed toward religion. These ideas and some technical problems with psychological measurement led the author and his associates to more narrowly define religious thinking. Our operational definition is that most of the time religious thinking is the preference for one or another Piagetian type of thinking—especially when a person is presented with a puzzling religious story that implicitly invites one's interpretation.

The stories chosen for assessing that kind of religious thinking were the same three stories Goldman had used, but the format was shifted to that of a multiple-choice test. For each of four questions per story, four possible answers were identified from the actual responses of North American Sunday School students (who had been queried in much the same way Goldman had done). Each of those four possible answers per question was referenced to a different one of Piaget's levels of thinking, using criteria suggested by Piaget or Goldman.<sup>9</sup> Then a student was asked to check which answer in each set of four possible answers he or she most agreed with and which he or she least agreed with. These responses left two possible answers unchecked. In this way, each student created a three-place rank order on four items. Across twelve such sets of a question and four possible answers, an individual would create a uniquely complex pattern of personal preferences for four levels of thinking. Thus, each student would not only exhibit a distinct pattern of preference for a type of religious thinking but would also receive a distinct scale score on one of four basic scales of religious thinking.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to the three stories used by Goldman, there had been added (1) a moral puzzle story from Piaget's early book on *The Moral Judgment of the Child* (1932);<sup>11</sup> (2) Mathis' Environmental Participation Index, a sixty-four-item checklist to assess socioeconomic class;<sup>12</sup> and (3) a series of questions from the University of Michigan's *Youth in Transition* study (1967), which probed the religious



behavior and commitment of respondents.<sup>13</sup>

With the cooperation of the National Association of Episcopal Schools, a random sample of classes within each of the nine grade levels from four through twelve was drawn. Between late November 1969 and the end of February 1970, teachers in some ninety-one schools administered the author's instrument *Thinking About the Bible* to just under two thousand students. The basic data processing consumed a fair part of 1970. Then the processed data was read onto magnetic tape, and a computer analyzed it according to programs from the University of California's biomedical computer programs package. This computer analysis took up what remained of 1970 and about two-thirds of 1971. The actual printouts were many, and it took the author two more years to complete writing up the interpretation of his study of religious thinking as a 695-page dissertation for the School of Education of New York University.<sup>14</sup>

However, in 1971 news of *Thinking About the Bible* spread, and two studies were mounted using it. The United Methodist Church's publishing house used it as part of a prepublication test of the then new Adult Bible study materials with a national sample of 3,289 adults. That study proved that adults did not object to the instrument and, in fact, found it quite stimulating. As one would expect, the adults tended to prefer abstract levels of thinking on a Piagetian continuum more so than had the children and adolescents in the author's original study.<sup>15</sup>

A second study in 1971 involved a close working relationship with Dr. Charles W. Laabs of Concordia Teacher's College in River Forest, Illinois, who drew a sample of 988 students from schools affiliated with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in northern Illinois. The study indicated that the Lutheran students moved through the same sequence of levels of thinking as the Episcopalian students, although they tended to do so at a noticeably slower rate. While the same progression was found in both studies, obviously the two student populations were different in how fast and how far they moved.<sup>16</sup>

In 1974 Dr. Kalevi Tamminen, professor of religious education in the Faculty of Theology at the University of Helsinki, translated *Thinking About the Bible* into Finnish and included it in an exten-

sive study mounted by the Institute of Practical Theology. In that study, 1,374 Finnish children and adolescents in the Finnish grade levels equivalent to North American grade levels four through twelve, plus ninety-six second-year students in the Faculty of Theology, were studied. This Finnish study gave clear evidence that religious thinking, as it is assessed by *Thinking About the Bible*, is neither a North American nor an English-speaking phenomenon. Evidence for each of the levels of thinking found earlier by Laabs and Peatling was found in the Finnish data. The Finnish theology students and the United Methodist adult Bible students seemed more alike than dissimilar in their thinking. Thus, it is probable that religious thinking is a reflection of a fundamental, inescapable human process of cognitive development.<sup>17</sup>

### **Religious Thinking: the Religious Education of Adolescents**

The results of all of these studies clearly suggest that religious thinking tends to develop toward a level of formal or abstract operational thinking (that is, a level of thinking in which one assumes objectivity toward oneself and ideas, uses propositional logic, and is able to envision a range of alternatives). Moreover, both Tamminen's and Peatling's studies lend support to a thesis of Professor E. A. Peel that adolescence is a period in which noticeable growth occurs in the ability to think.<sup>18</sup> This finding denies the facile idea that adolescents really are adults who are held in school until the job market is ready for them. It suggests that adolescents are still cognitively developing humans. All educators need to be aware that adolescence is most probably a period of cognitive growth toward adult levels of thinking. Adults are distinguished from adolescents, in terms of religious thinking, by their preference for abstractions, their increased ability to deal with them, and the decreased likelihood that they will get caught in the sheer concrete specificities of a situation. Adolescents approach this pattern, but have not yet arrived at a thoroughly adult level of thinking.

This view of adolescent thinking is also supported by data the author has for a select sample of 107 adult religious educators in their twenties, thirties, forties, and fifties. The sample is quite ecumenical; its participants came from Protestant, Roman Catholic,

Anglican, and Eastern Orthodox churches and several Jewish synagogues. Moreover, their average scores on the scales of religious thinking generated by *Thinking About the Bible* tend to be in excess of those for the high school students in any of the other studies.<sup>19</sup> Logically, psychologically, and developmentally, Professor Peel's thesis seems to be true. Therefore, those who assume the work of religious education should *expect* adolescents to change their thinking across the years of junior and senior high school. For example:<sup>20</sup>

1. Some questions will become very important for early adolescents, and they will press them quite hard. Then they will seem to resolve those questions and, perhaps, move on to others. But in a few years, those same questions will come up again—only this time they will be asked from a new, more advanced cognitive level. The old answer no longer satisfies the growing thinker, and a new answer needs to be found.

2. Probably decisions that are made in early adolescence will, in a sense, come unglued. They will be questioned. When this happens, a middle or late adolescent is looking for a cognitively advanced reason to maintain the earlier commitment. Cognitively, the old must continuously be built into the new. If this does not happen, earlier good reasons may all too easily be discarded as too childish.

Basically, adolescence is a period of cognitive transition. The ways of thinking children prefer (largely, they prefer to think on a concrete operational level) are changing into the beginnings of the ways adults prefer to think (on a formal or abstract operational level). Anyone working with adolescents must, then, understand that their religious thinking is in transition. However, all of the studies during the 1960s and 1970s indicate the direction in which thinking is changing during adolescence. Thus, the most practical advice anyone can give is to expect adolescent boys and girls to change in how they think and to be prepared to think along with them at increasingly formal or abstract levels. Doing that may be not only all one can do; it may well be the most effective way to help an adolescent grow into adulthood as a still religious person.

The author's original study of Episcopalian students indicated that they went through four discernible levels along the way to becoming

a high school graduate. Those levels were associated with school grade levels and may be of help to the reader in understanding adolescence as a period of growth. Therefore, they are listed below.

1. *Grades 4 and 5.* This level includes a lot of changing and growing, but it clearly marks the beginning of a transition from the concrete operational thinking of childhood. The religious thinking of students at this level tends to be very concrete: They will take an all-too-literal interpretation, albeit often a tolerably logical one, given *only* the situational specifics. They will probably do better with history as fact than they will with history as the expression of meaning. Metaphors, allegories, and some analogies may be difficult for them. However, one must continuously check to see just where in their cognitive development they are.

2. *Grades 6 and 7.* This level includes slightly less change and is a further step in the transition from concrete operational to formal or abstract operational thinking. These students' religious thinking still tends to be quite concrete, but now the attractiveness of a next level of thinking probably is recognized. This group is hard to characterize, for they will probably show moments of next-level thinking without actually consistently preferring the formal or abstract operational level. Some will begin to be able to appreciate metaphor, allegory, and analogy. One must, however, continually check to know where their thinking is, and one should not expect too much consistency in thinking from them.

3. *Grades 8 and 9.* Adolescents in this level are reasonably alike in their thinking. This is the first level where there is evidence for most (but not all!) students' preferring an early form of formal or abstract operational thinking. These students will probably be able to start to understand history as the expression of meaning, and they will have begun to be able to appreciate metaphor, allegory, and analogy. However, because this level is but a first step, one must still check carefully just how they are thinking, although their consistency will probably show a marked improvement.

4. *Grades 10, 11, and 12.* Not only are the youth in this level reasonably alike in their thinking; they are noticeably more likely to consistently prefer to use formal or abstract operational thinking. These students are quite likely to understand that meanings are



often expressed in and through the simple facts of history. They quite probably can appreciate metaphors, analogies, and allegories. They may even be creative in creating contemporary ones on their own. At this level of religious thinking, some intellectual rigor can be appreciated. The sequential study of the Bible, the exploration of either a theology or a set of theological themes, and the investigation of the complexities of translating principles into actions can be a challenge rather than an example of asking far too much far too early from a growing person.<sup>21</sup> Still, it is important to check the actual level of thinking of any group of adolescents, for they are growing cognitively. Listening carefully and thinking along with them remains an important strategy in working with these adolescents.

One may wonder what is left for adult cognitive growth. Actually, a great deal. The author's select sample of adult religious educators indicates a growth spurt during the late twenties to a plateau that lasts throughout the thirties and early forties. Another growth spurt during the late forties moves to an advanced plateau that lasts throughout the fifties and (perhaps) well into the sixties. During these decades of adult life, preference for formal or abstract operational thinking becomes stronger and stronger until, sometime around the early fifties, adults exhibit a preference pattern for the types of religious thinking that exactly match the sequence of types on a Piagetian continuum of operational thinking.<sup>22</sup>

Still, one may well ask, "What does that mean?"

Although the study of adult religious thinking is just beginning, it is probable that what we do know involves the fundamental affirmation that adults can mature into:

1. A growing appreciation of Paul's poignant sense of the ambiguity of the religious life (Rom. 7:15–20);
2. A realistic appreciation of what it means to be saved by grace alone (Rom. 3:21–25; Eph. 2:4–10);
3. A paradoxically humbling ennoblement as one identifies ever more closely with Peter's commission to "feed my lambs" (John 21:15–18);
4. A growing awareness that the busy disciples on the road to Emmaus are distinct examples of persons like ourselves (Luke 24:13–16).



Each of these insights requires an objectivity toward oneself and one's ideas, an ability to abstract oneself from the concrete specificities of a situation and to identify meaning within, through, or underneath one's personal historical facts. Each of these insights is a mark of maturity in the Christian life.

*What the research data suggests is simple: Such maturity comes slowly across decades of living.* Adolescents are moving toward that maturity, but one should not expect them to do more than move toward it. Some will reach it sooner than others, of course, but (in sheerly Pauline terms) that fact is no more than a "gift," which exists for the health of the whole (1 Cor. 12:7). It certainly is no sign of any spiritual superiority!

Moreover, as adults increasingly prefer formal or abstract operational thinking, there may come a profound appreciation of what it means to regard thinking and the religious as related by intersection. The relation of intersection insures a mystery in the religious that is not thinking: God, while approachable, always remains the Other to his creatures. It probably takes adult-level religious thinking, for example, to either understand or to find strength in the theological truism that while we depend upon God, he does not depend upon us. It is toward such a possibility that adolescents grow as they tend toward more and more formal or abstract operational thinking. Like many things in God's creation, that result is not inevitable. But that possibility means that those who work with cognitively growing adolescents can be filled with hope.

### Notes

1. Dr. Leslie Francis' creatively critical paper, "The Humpty Dumpty Phenomenon in Research on Religious Thinking," delivered at the second Lancaster Colloquium on the Psychology of Religion (Jan. 8-9, 1977) suggested a threefold distinction: thinking about religion; thinking religiously; and thinking in religious categories.

2. Goldman, Ronald J. *Religious Thinking from Childhood to Adolescence* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964; New York: Seabury Press, 1968). This work is referenced in the text as *RTFCTA*.

3. Goldman, Ronald J. *Readiness for Religion: a Basis for Developmental Religious Education*. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965; New York: Seabury Press,

1968). This work is referenced in the text as *RFR*.

4. Although this denial of a separate religious rationality may seem to be unexceptionable in the late 1970s, the author can recall the severe shock experienced by some of his colleagues in the department of Christian education of the Episcopal church in 1964 when Goldman made this point quite explicitly during a one-day consultation.

5. As of 1977, the state-supported schools in England are still governed by the parliamentary Education Act of 1944, which made religious education a state-mandated school subject in all schools.

6. Goldman reported that he used in preliminary interviews the stories of (1) Moses and the burning bush, (2) the crossing of the Red Sea, (3) the call of the child Samuel, (4) King Ahab and Naboth's vineyard, (5) Jesus in the Temple as a boy, (6) the healing of blind Bartimaeus, (7) the temptations of Jesus, and (8) the resurrection appearance on the road to Emmaus. See *RTFCTA*, p. 37.

7. See the reviews by the North Americans David Elkind and Bernard Spilka, as well as that by the Belgian Andre Godin, in Merton P. Strommen, ed., *Research on Religious Development: a Comprehensive Handbook* (New York: Hawthorne Books, Inc., 1971).

8. The five questions Goldman used in his developmental analysis are listed in *RTFCTA*, p. 51 (English and American editions).

9. In addition to criteria for Piaget's basic sequence of (1) pre-operational, (2) concrete operational, and (3) formal operational levels of thinking, the author added criteria suggested by Goldman for an advanced formal operational level of thinking. That suggestion was contained in a mimeographed summary of his dissertation that Goldman published privately in 1962 while teaching at The University, Reading, England.

10. The four basic scales of religious thinking generated by the author's instrument, *Thinking About the Bible*, are called: (1) *Very Concrete*, which is referenced to criteria for pre-operational and early concrete operational thinking; (2) *Concrete*, which is referenced to criteria for concrete operational thinking; (3) *Abstract*, which is referenced to the criteria for formal operational thinking; and (4) *Very Abstract*, which is referenced to Goldman's criteria for an advanced level of formal operational thinking.

11. See Jean Piaget, *The Moral Judgment of the Child* (New York: Crowell-Collier Publishing Company, 1932/1962).

12. The basic reference for Mathis' EPI is H. Mathis, "Environment, Aptitude, and Race." Master's thesis, Wayne State University, 1966.

13. See J. G. Bachman et al., *Youth in Transition 1* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan, Institute for Social Research, 1967).

14. Peatling, John H. *The Incidence of Concrete and Abstract Religious Thinking in the Interpretation of Three Bible Stories by Pupils Enrolled in Grades Four Through Twelve in Selected Schools in The Episcopal Church in the United States of America*. Doctoral dissertation, New York University, 1973.

15. See John H. Peatling, Charles W. Laabs, and Thomas B. Newton, "Cognitive Development: a Three-Sample Comparison of Means on the Peatling Scale of Reli-

gious Thinking," *Character Potential: a Record of Research* 7, no. 3 (August, 1975), pp. 159-162.

16. See John H. Peatling and Charles W. Laabs, "Cognitive Development of Pupils in Grades Four Through Twelve: A Comparative Study of Lutheran and Episcopalian Children and Youth," *Character Potential: a Record of Research* 7, no. 2 (March 1975): 107-115.

17. See Kalevi Tamminen, "Research Concerning the Development of Religious Thinking in Finnish Students: a Report of Results" and John H. Peatling, "Finn and American: Reflections on a Comparison," *Character Potential: a Record of Research* 7, no. 4 (April 1976): 206-225.

18. See E. A. Peel, "Intellectual Growth During Adolescence," *Educational Review* 17, no. 3 (June 1965): 169-180. Also see E. A. Peel, "A Study of the Differences in the Judgments of Adolescent Pupils," *The British Journal of Educational Psychology* 36, part I (February 1966).

19. See Table 11, Comparison of Student and Adult Religious Thinking (Total Abstract) Scale Means by Age-level Groupings in John H. Peatling, *Signs of Structure and Signs of Dissonance: Adult Responses to a Piagetian Moral Puzzle* (Schenectady, New York: The Author, 1976), p. 51.

20. In these two examples the author, like Goldman, offers an informed and knowledgeable inference from his research data on adolescent levels of religious thinking to adolescent cognitive behavior. The reader should be aware of the exact nature of these examples as inferences, for the empirical research to describe adolescent questioning and its relation to earlier decisions (as a function of level of religious thinking) still needs to be done.

21. The author is consciously echoing Goldman's thesis that a weakness of Christian education is "a direct result of trying to teach too much (and too much which is inappropriate) at too early an age." (See RFR, p. 65.)

22. See John H. Peatling, "Continuing Development of a Sense of Justice," *Vocational Guidance Quarterly* (June, 1977).

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## Moral Development in Adolescence

Margaret Webster

Some adults would say, "It's about time we considered the moral development of youth!" Older generations have frequently tended to accuse youth of introducing a new morality or of having no morals.

Youth themselves claim that they are trying to discover what morality is, whose values are best, what the right decisions are in a world of many choices. They are aware of different standards in the home, the church, the peer group, and society as a whole. In the midst of such confusion, they ask, "How does one make moral judgments, and how can one live morally?"

In recent years Lawrence Kohlberg has contributed greatly to the understanding of the moral development of persons. Consideration of his work can help those who work with youth understand where youth may be in this development. However, since any youth group is likely to include persons at a variety of stages of development, it is important to look at the total scope of Kohlberg's contribution.

### Kohlberg—the Man and His Work

Heinz, hoping to save the life of his wife, who was dying of cancer, tried in vain to raise sufficient money to purchase a new, promising drug that had been discovered by the druggist in their small European village. He also failed to persuade the druggist to give him credit toward the purchase. Desperate, Heinz broke into the store one night and stole the drug. Should Heinz have done this? If he was caught, should the judge send him to jail? If Heinz' wife was suffering unbearably and pleaded with the doctor to give her sufficient painkiller to end her life, should the doctor agree? Should a judge punish the doctor if he did so?

Using stories and questions like those of the Heinz dilemma,



Lawrence Kohlberg has spent much of his adult life studying the development of moral judgment in children and adults. Kohlberg, who was born in Bronxville, New York, in 1927, developed during a three-year period as a United States Merchant Marine a keen interest in ethics and psychology. His subsequent university studies focused in these areas, and in 1958 he received a doctor of philosophy degree in psychology from the University of Chicago. His thesis title was "The Development of Modes of Moral Thinking and Choice in the Years Ten to Sixteen."

Kohlberg is now professor of education and social psychology at Harvard University, where he has continued his interest in moral development and has explored the implications of his theory as a basis for moral education.

### **Other Studies of Moral Development**

Among several theories of moral development, the one theory that Kohlberg believed to hold some promise for the understanding of moral development was that of Jean Piaget. Among the many aspects of cognitive development studied by Piaget was the development of moral judgment (1932). Piaget had concluded that the child's cognitive structures influenced his perception of experience and therefore of morality. He delineated two stages of moral development. One he described as a heteronomous stage (before seven or eight years) during which the child views morality as obedience to unchangeable rules fixed by respected authorities, with disobedience leading to imminent retributive justice. The second he identified as an autonomous stage in which responsibility shifts to the self; rules are the result of mutual agreement with peers; and justice is distributive.

Recognizing the merits of Piaget's cognitive developmental approach but also the limitations of a two-stage theory to explain variations in thinking for persons over age eight, Kohlberg undertook his own research and constructed his theoretical framework.

### **Kohlberg's Research**

The original sample for Kohlberg's research was a group of seventy-five boys aged ten, thirteen, and sixteen. He has now

followed these boys in a longitudinal study, testing them at three-year intervals from early adolescence into adulthood. He and others have replicated his original research in cross-sectional studies in the United States, Canada, Great Britain, Taiwan, Turkey, Malaysia, and Mexico.

In his research, Kohlberg used ten dilemmas similar to the Heinz dilemma with related questions. With younger children he always had interviews; with older children, youth, and adults he used oral interviews or written responses.

His interviews took the form of the semiclinical method used by Piaget—that is, though there were some fixed questions, the interviewer was also free to pursue the subject's own direction of thinking. Interviews were taped and transcribed for analysis.

To aid in the analyzing of protocols from interviews and written responses, Kohlberg and others have developed scoring guides. In this way, assessment of moral reasoning on a more uniform basis is possible.

Findings from this research led Kohlberg to formulate his theory of the development of moral judgment. Similar research by J. Rest, E. V. Sullivan, E. Turiel, and others has given support for the theory.

### The Development of Moral Judgment

#### *Definition of the Moral*

For Kohlberg "the term 'moral' refers to moral judgments or decisions based on moral judgments . . . . We define morality in terms of the formal character of a moral judgment or a moral point of view, rather than in terms of its content." <sup>1</sup> "Moral judgments are judgments about the right and the good of action . . . . Moral judgments tend to be universal, inclusive, consistent, and grounded on objective, impersonal, or ideal grounds." <sup>2</sup>

The highest stages of moral judgment are "principled." By *moral principle* he means "a universal mode of choosing . . . a general guide to choice rather than a rule of action." <sup>3</sup>

Kohlberg indicates that for him the highest moral principle is *justice*. "Our major and most controversial claim is that the only 'true' moral principle is justice." <sup>4</sup>

It is evident that Kohlberg rejects the understanding of morality as a code of ethics, a “bag of virtues,” or a set of relativistic values. His assumption is “that there are in fact universal ethical values and principles.”<sup>5</sup> To be moral, then, is to think morally, to apply one’s cognitive abilities to moral issues. While moral judgment has its *affective* aspect, “the quality . . . of affects in moral judgment is determined by its *cognitive-structural* development, a development which is part and parcel with the general development of the child’s conceptions of a moral order.”<sup>6</sup> “It is this emphasis on the distinctive form (as opposed to content) of . . . moral thought which allows us to call all men moral philosophers.”<sup>7</sup>

### *Stages of Moral Development*

As moral philosophers, people develop through stages of moral reasoning. Kohlberg describes three developmental levels, each with two stages:<sup>8</sup>

**Preconventional Level:** The child is concerned with the consequences of action or with the power of those who enforce the rules that govern his action.

**Stage 1. Punishment and Obedience Orientation:** Judgments regarding behavior are made in relation to fear of punishment, with unquestioning deference to superior power.

**Stage 2. Instrumental Relativist Orientation:** Judgments are determined by the usefulness of their consequences to the individual. “It is right if it is good for me.” Occasionally the needs of others are considered, but from the point of view that reciprocity is a matter of “You scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours.”

**Conventional Level:** The expectations and rules of the individual’s family, group, or nation become important. Personal conformity to and societal maintenance of law and order are paramount concerns.

**Stage 3. Interpersonal Concordance or “Good Boy—Nice Girl” Orientation:** Judgments regarding good behavior involve that which pleases or helps others (especially family or peers) and is approved by them.

**Stage 4. Law and Order Orientation:** Judgments are made in relation to authority, fixed rules, and the maintenance of the

social order. Doing one's duty, showing respect for authority, and maintaining the social order are important.

Postconventional Level: There is a thrust toward autonomous moral principles that have universal validity and application.

Stage 5. Social-Contract Legalistic Orientation: Judgments are made in relation to what is best for the greatest number of people and may involve the changing of society's laws.

Stage 6. Universal Ethical-Principle Orientation: Judgments are based upon self-chosen ethical principles that appeal to comprehensiveness, universality, consistency, and justice.

While Kohlberg's work focused on these six stages in the development of moral reasoning, it should be noted that more recently he has tentatively proposed the possibility of two additional stages. He indicates that, in his work with persons in reform and penal institutions, he has discovered what appears to be a stage 0, with only rudimentary and undifferentiated moral thinking. He also sees the possibility of a stage 7, "meaning of life" orientation, in which such questions as "Why be moral?" are considered religious or metaphysical questions.<sup>9</sup>

Occasionally Kohlberg also discovered, with some young people—particularly with some college youth—what appeared to be stage 2 arguments but with much more sophistication in language and content. His theory does not allow for regression. He finally concluded that some people, in transition from stage 4 conventional thinking to the more autonomous stage 5 thinking, appear temporarily to use relativistic arguments in the transitional process. This type of transitional argument he now calls stage 4½ or 5 (2).

### *The Meaning of Stage*

As in other cognitive developmental theories, the stages of moral development are *structured wholes*, total ways of thinking regarding moral issues. The construct stage implies a state in which the cognitive structures are qualitatively different from those of other stages. The stages are culturally universal, occur in an invariant sequence, and have a hierarchical relationship with each stage building on the previous ones.

Kohlberg has elaborated on his description of stage thinking in regard to twenty-eight basic aspects of morality which he believes to be found in any culture. These universal aspects of morality include the value of human life and motives for engaging in moral action, duty, responsibility.<sup>10</sup>

### *Developmental Transition*

Development occurs partially as a result of the individual's internal reorganization of cognitive structures and partially from the interaction of the individual with the environment. The individual is active in this process, so that development is "self-constructed and self-regulated."<sup>11</sup> Kohlberg speaks of "cognitive conflict," which leads to "internal cognitive reorganization."<sup>12</sup>

*Stage mixture* is frequently seen as an indication of movement from one stage to the next. For instance, a person who is using chiefly stage 3 arguments may still retain some stage 2 thinking and may, on occasion, introduce some stage 4 ideas. Such a person is likely to be involved in a transitional process from one stage to the next; that person, however, will rarely be able to use arguments from more than one stage below or one above those of the dominant stage.<sup>13</sup>

As a stimulus to development, Kohlberg stresses the importance of opportunities for the person to take roles or role-play and to participate in family, peer group, and school communities.<sup>14</sup>

Persons pass through the stages at varying speeds and may become fixated in any stage of development. Kohlberg suggests that stages 5 and 6 "are still minority stages in the adult American population, even though stage 5 constitutes the public morality of the Constitution and the Supreme Court."<sup>15</sup> Probably "only 5 percent reach the highest moral stage."<sup>16</sup>

### *Moral Judgment and Moral Action*

The work of Kohlberg has been primarily in regard to moral judgment, moral thinking, and moral reasoning. At the lower stages of development in moral judgment, moral action does not necessarily correspond with moral reasoning. However, Kohlberg points out that at the higher stages there is greater consistency between moral



judgment and moral action. "Moral maturity," he says, is "the capacity to make decisions and judgments which are moral (that is, based on internal principles) and to act in accordance with such judgments." <sup>17</sup>

### **Moral Development: The Aim of Moral Education**

In several of his articles Kohlberg has dealt with the implications of his theory of the development of moral judgment for moral education. He points out that, consciously or unconsciously, the school is inevitably involved in moral education. He refutes the idea that the educator's primary task is the transmission of information and of rules and values collected from the past.<sup>18</sup> Instead, Kohlberg states that "the goal of moral education is the stimulation of the 'natural' development of the individual child's own moral judgment and capacities, thus allowing him to use his own moral judgment to control his behavior." <sup>19</sup>

Consistent with his emphasis on peer-group participation as a stimulus for development, he stresses the importance of the classroom in providing this participation. A climate of freedom, cooperation, and justice in the school and classroom will, he believes, help to foster development.

As the chief means of stimulating development he proposes that, in moral education discussions, students be confronted with arguments at a level 1 stage higher than that in which they are presently functioning. This means that teachers need to be at least generally aware of the developmental stage or stages in which students are located. It also suggests that, for effective communication, there should be a match between the teacher's level and the child's. The teacher should be located in or utilizing arguments typical of one stage above that of the most advanced pupil.

### **Kohlberg and Religious Education**

Kohlberg does not see religion as a motivating force in moral development. He states that there is fallacy in "the notion that basic moral principles are dependent upon a particular religion, or any religion at all. We have found no important differences in development of moral thinking between Catholics, Protestants, Jews,

Buddhists, Moslems, and atheists. Children's moral values in the religious area seem to go through the same stages as their general moral values." <sup>20</sup>

He does, however, recognize that "with regard to the *content* of moral beliefs, religious differences exist." He goes on to say:

Formal religious education has no specifically important or unique role to play in moral development as opposed to the role of the public school and the family in this area. The primary purpose of religious education in our society is not to develop moral character but rather to develop religious beliefs and sentiments. The teaching of religious beliefs requires a teaching of their moral aspects as well as their theological aspects, since all religions stress an associated moral code. On the whole, however, the mark of success of such teaching is that it helps the child to make his religious and his moral beliefs and sentiments an integrated whole.<sup>21</sup>

### A Critique of Kohlberg's Theory

Following this survey of Kohlberg's work and thinking, we should endeavor now to assess his contribution to an understanding of moral development. It is apparent that there are both strengths and weaknesses in his theory.

There is undoubtedly merit in his placement of moral development firmly within a cognitive-structural framework. In a society that holds such a variety of value systems, persons must apply their own cognitive abilities to judgments concerning moral issues. His emphasis on rational decision making and personal choice in moral development is a healthy antidote to the encouragement of blind acceptance and internalization of society's values. As persons use their cognitive abilities and develop through the various stages, they become increasingly autonomous, free and responsible individuals capable of moral decisions and moral behavior.

Kohlberg's careful description and analysis of stages of moral reasoning and stage transition have provided valuable insights for those who wish to understand the thinking of children, youth, and adults regarding moral issues. His research has been replicated in sufficient places and by sufficient people to confirm its validity. A developmental orientation such as his is helpful to educators, who need to be aware of the type of discussion of which students are

capable and the type of discussion that might stimulate further development.

For persons who are prepared to undertake in-depth study of moral development and the assessment of moral reasoning, Kohlberg's instrument for discerning stages of moral judgment (related to the ten dilemmas) is a most useful tool. It has been used with good success to analyze the moral reasoning of children, youth, and adults, and to discover development of reasoning that may result from moral education classes and discussions.

With Kohlberg's theory, however, as with other developmental theories, caution needs to be exercised to ensure that stage analyses do not become person labels, which may imply disapproval of some thinking and therefore of some persons. We ought not to speak of a stage 2 person but rather of the stage 2 thinking, which a person may be using. It must be remembered that in most cases people make the best type of moral judgment of which they are capable at the time. Also, in most cases they have the potential for other viewpoints, which they will utilize as they are able. Kohlberg's theory is useful in helping us to understand where people are in their development and where they may be moving; his theory is not to be used to evaluate, judge, and condemn people.

One problem that many scholars find in Kohlberg's work is his inconsistency in regard to the relationship of form and content in moral reasoning. Within a single article contradictions occur. For instance, in his 1971 paper on "Stages of Moral Development" he indicates: "We define morality in terms of the formal character of a moral judgment or a moral point of view, rather than in terms of its content."<sup>22</sup> Then, a few pages later, he says: "Our conception of moral principle implies that one cannot ultimately separate form and content in moral analysis."<sup>23</sup> In considerations of the adequacy of reasoning within the various stages, questions arise as to whether it is the quality of reasoning or the nature of the content of such reasoning or a combination of both that is being examined. Similarly in some places where he stresses the primacy of the principle of justice he appears to have in mind a content-free "moral resolution of competing claims."<sup>24</sup> In other places justice appears to include

such content as reciprocity and equality in human relations, liberty, and sympathy. While Kohlberg appears to prefer emphasis on moral reasoning rather than content, it would seem that the content of such reasoning is of importance also. He fails to deal adequately with the relationship.

A closely related problem arises for those concerned about religion and morality. Kohlberg minimizes the contribution of religion to moral development. As noted above, he has made some reference to the religious content of moral beliefs. But the place he gives to religious influences in regard to the development and the content of religious thinking seems most inadequate, especially to those persons who have recognized the importance of religious motivation in relation to many of their own ethical decisions. Much more work needs to be done regarding the relationship of religious influences on moral development.

In spite of the inadequacy of Kohlberg's treatment of the relationship between religion and moral development, a number of persons concerned with religious development have found inspiration from Kohlberg's theory of moral development. The present writer undertook research to discover whether persons think of God as judge in the same way that they think of the judge in the Heinz dilemma. In an exploratory study such thinking was evident and appeared to influence the individual's total idea of God. Edward Everding, Clarence Snelling, and Mary Wilcox have examined the influence of a person's social perspective, as seen in the various Kohlberg stages, on the person's interpretation of biblical material. James Fowler, drawing heavily on the work of Kohlberg as well as on insights from Piaget and Erikson, has developed a theory of faith development. In each of these studies implications for religious education have been explored.

Thus, while there are limitations in Kohlberg's work, religious education is indebted to him for his contribution to an understanding of how persons think about moral issues at various stages of development and how such development can be stimulated. Religious educators are also indebted to Kohlberg for the seminal nature of his work, which has led to additional studies specifically in the

area of religious development.

### **Youth in Kohlberg's Developmental Stages**

What, then, has Kohlberg to contribute specifically to our understanding of youth? The answer to that question is not easy to discover. Kohlberg has helped in the understanding of the way persons develop in their moral reasoning capacity; but he has not suggested age specifications for his developmental stages. He has indicated that persons develop at their own speed through the stages and may become fixated within any stage. Taken seriously, these claims could mean that a youth might be located in any stage from 1 to 6 and that any group of youth might include persons located in many stages.

In seeking a clue regarding the probable stage location of a majority of youth, the work of Edmund Sullivan, a co-director of the Moral Education Project undertaken by the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, is helpful. In preparation for experimental moral education classes in elementary and secondary schools, several samples of children and youth (aged nine to eighteen) were tested with Kohlberg's moral judgment questionnaire. The younger children (nine- and ten-year-olds) responded chiefly with pre-conventional stage 1 and 2 judgments. At eleven years, stage 3 responses appeared more frequently; by age twelve most stage 1 responses had disappeared; and by age fifteen stage 3 thinking was the predominant mode. Between fifteen and eighteen years stage 3 thinking remained the most common, but stage 4 thinking appeared more frequently; and occasional evidence of stage 5 thinking emerged. No stage 6 thinking was apparent in the sample.<sup>25</sup>

If one can generalize from this sample (and generalization is accompanied by the possibility of error in many individual cases), it might be implied that thinking related to moral judgments tends to develop somewhat as follows:

Elementary school children: Thinking is predominantly in pre-conventional stages 1 and 2.

Junior high school youth: This is a transitional period with thinking moving from pre-conventional to conventional levels.



Senior high school youth: The predominant mode of thinking is in the conventional stages 3 and/or 4, with the possibility of some postconventional stage 5 thinking beginning to appear during the later years.

Adults: Thinking may be conventional or postconventional. The prerequisites for the more rarely found stage 6 thinking are probably both a good deal of formal cognitive ability plus considerable maturity and experience with adult life issues.

This probably means, then, that most youth are making moral judgments at the stage 3 or 4 levels. Some may exhibit remnants of stage 2 thinking. A few may begin to give evidence of stage 5 thinking. Those who work with youth, then, should have a clear understanding of the nature of reasoning within stages 3 and 4, to be aware of the present thinking of the youth, and also an understanding of stage 5 reasoning, toward which youth may be moving. Some further elaboration of stages 3, 4, and 5 reasoning is therefore provided below.

### *Stage 3: Interpersonal Concordance or "Good-Boy, Nice-Girl" Orientation*

The person who has attained stage 3 thinking has left behind the more egocentric, relativistic, and hedonistic thinking of the pre-conventional level and is now concerned with moral judgments in relation to "my family, my group, my local church." Moral decisions are based on what these groups, which entail personal involvement, believe to be right and on what will help and please the other persons who belong to the groups. Other families, other groups, other churches may be somewhat suspect; their moral judgments may indeed be quite wrong. Behavior now is judged by intention; "he means well" begins to appear.

To the Heinz dilemma the person with stage 3 thinking may reply: "Heinz should have done this because he loved his wife very much and this was the only way he could save her. So he was forced to do it . . . . The judge should let him go free because the judge should understand that the stealing of the drug was for a good cause and that it was the poor man's only solution. What else could he have done?" (Response of a sixteen-year-old girl.)

In regard to any religious content of thinking, persons using stage 3 reasoning are likely to think of God as a kind, loving Father or friend who is concerned about the covenant relationship with his children, watches over them always, and is ready to forgive them in a fair, impartial way. The church for them should always be a loving, caring community to which they may be loyal. The good thing to do is that which the church approves; the good thing to avoid is that which the church disapproves.

Into the somewhat pleasant, rose-colored world of stage 3, however, conflict may intrude. That which pleases my peer group may not please my family or my church and vice versa. The judgments of others outside my group may appear to have validity also. As persons come increasingly into contact with other families, other groups, other churches, such conflicts may increase. The person facing such conflict may retreat into fixation in a stage 3 position or move forward to stage 4 thinking.

#### *Stage 4: Law and Order Orientation*

In stage 4 authority moves to a broader grouping—society, the nation. Now “my country” is right; “my country” is the best in the world. The person now recognizes that, if society is to survive, order is important. Laws and regulations have been established to maintain this order. It is a citizen’s duty to abide by the laws, respect authority, and report wrongdoing.

In regard to the Heinz dilemma the person with stage 4 thinking says: “No, Heinz should not have done that. He was breaking the law. It was his duty to help his wife but also his duty not to break the law about stealing. He should have found some other way to help her . . . . The judge would have to punish him. If everybody broke laws like that, we would have chaos.” (Response of a seventeen-year-old boy.)

This type of thinking leads to thought of God as a lawgiver (the Ten Commandments) whose chief concern is that people keep his laws. He will judge people accordingly. The church then has responsibility for teaching God’s laws and admonishing people to live by them. The church and/or the Bible becomes the final authority in relation to moral judgment and action. The law of God as recorded

in the Bible and proclaimed by the church demands unquestioning obedience.

But even the security of loyalty to a law-and-order society may be shaken. Older youth may become aware of corruption within a nation's legislative structure; they may discover that a particular set of laws is not adequate to deal with a specific situation; they may see one so-called Christian nation at war with another. Recognition of such inadequacies in legal authority may lead to movement to a stage 5 type of thinking.

### ***Stage 5: Social-Contract Legalistic Orientation***

As one moves into stage 5 thinking he begins to gain the ability to look objectively at his own society and laws in a more autonomous fashion. There is an attempt to discover some universal principles that one can adopt to guide decision and action. Utilitarian concerns (the greatest good for the greatest number) become important. It is now recognized that laws are important for the functioning of society but that they are made by mutual agreement to provide for concern for the greatest number. Laws can be changed when it is expedient to revise them.

The Heinz dilemma for the person with stage 5 thinking raises the question of the value of human life as opposed to any law regarding theft: "For Heinz there will be a real moral dilemma. He would not wish to violate the legal code that prohibits theft, but he would value even more the life of a human being. For this reason he would steal the drug and be willing to accept the consequences of his action." (Response of man age twenty-six.)

The religious content of thinking at stage 5 represents God as giving freedom and responsibility to every individual. People within the stage are now able better to understand the teachings of Jesus such as "You have heard that it was said . . . . But I say to you" (Matt. 5:38-39, RSV).

This does not mean that persons at this stage reject all of the church's teaching but that they begin to comprehend why certain things are taught. They then accept or reject these things for themselves. They begin to reach the maturity mentioned in Ephesians 4:13: "Until we all attain to the unity of faith and of the knowledge of

the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (RSV).

### The Church and Youth Development

Finally, what has Kohlberg to say to those who carry leadership responsibility for youth in the church? A study of Kohlberg's theory of moral development raises many issues for the consideration of those concerned with the religious education of youth. Only three of these will be mentioned here.

1. *Know youth.* If the church is to work effectively with youth, it must seek to know them and their thinking, including their thinking in relation to moral judgments. Those concerned with youth must be ready to respect them as persons and to listen with similar respect to their thinking. Kohlberg's theory will help in the understanding of the thinking of youth and the direction in which we hope their development will go.

2. *Know the goals and objectives* of the church in relation to the religious education of youth. If the goal of a church is merely to have its youth absorb the traditional body of biblical and doctrinal teaching and maintain the status quo of the congregation, then it can use narrative, indoctrinative methods of transmitting its heritage to youth.

If, on the other hand, the goal is, like Kohlberg's aim in regard to moral education, to stimulate the development of the capacities and judgment of youth to the place where youth make their own response and decisions, methods to stimulate thought and development must be found.

3. *Know the leaders of youth.* The leader's level of development in moral and religious thinking seems bound to influence the level of discussion and thinking that takes place in any youth group. An authoritarian, conventional-thinking leader is not likely to help youth move to an autonomous stage of thinking and acting. Nor will such a leader be able to comprehend the thinking of some youth who may be far beyond the development of the leader. Such lack of understanding may mean that youth will become discouraged and leave the youth group and the church.

A church's knowledge of its youth, its establishment of appropriate goals and objectives for religious education, and its selection

and training of suitable leaders will do much to provide the stimulation which will help youth in their development of moral judgment and, indeed, in the development of faith.

### Notes

1. Lawrence Kohlberg, "Stages of Moral Development as a Basis for Moral Education," *Moral Education*, ed. C. M. Beck, B. S. Crittenden, and E. V. Sullivan (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), p. 55.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 86-88.

9. Lawrence Kohlberg, *The Ethical Life, the Contemplative Life, and Ultimate Religion*. Unpublished lecture, 1970.

10. Kohlberg, "Stages of Moral Development as a Basis for Moral Education," p. 88.

11. E. Turiel, "Stage Transition in Moral Development," *Second Handbook on Teaching*, ed. R. M. Travers (Chicago: Rand McNally and Co., 1973), p. 732.

12. Kohlberg, "Stages of Moral Development as a Basis for Moral Education," p. 49.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

14. Lawrence Kohlberg, "Moral Education in the Schools: a Developmental View," *School Review* 1 (1966, 1974): 17; "Stages of Moral Development as a Basis for Moral Education," p. 50.

15. Lawrence Kohlberg, "Moral and Religious Education and the Public Schools: a Developmental View," *Religion and Public Education*, ed. T. R.Sizer (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1967), p. 170.

16. Lawrence Kohlberg, "Development as the Aim of Education," *Harvard Educational Review*, 1972, p. 486.

17. Lawrence Kohlberg, "Development of Moral Character and Moral Ideology," *Review of Child Development*, ed. M. L. Hoffman and L. W. Hoffman (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1964), p. 425.

18. Kohlberg, "Development as the Aim of Education," p. 453.

19. Kohlberg, "Stages of Moral Development as a Basis for Moral Education," p. 71.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

21. Kohlberg, "Moral and Religious Education and the Public Schools: a Developmental View," pp. 180-181.



22. Kohlberg, "Stages of Moral Development as a Basis for Moral Education," p. 55.
23. Ibid., p. 60.
24. Ibid., p. 63.
25. E. V. Sullivan, *Moral Learning: Some Findings, Issues, and Questions* (New York: Paulist Press, 1975), pp. 14-17.

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# 6

## Counseling with Youth

Stanley J. Watson

Most young people live in a pressure-cooker environment consisting of a whirlwind of social activities, school assignments, and family schedules. In a driving effort to meet these demands, many of them remain personally dissatisfied. This unmet hunger leads them to experiment with drugs, astrology, therapy fads, and Eastern religious cults. It is not unusual to poll a youth group and find them declaring that their greatest problem is too many assignments. They may go on to assert that their greatest need is for more things to do!

The answer to this paradox appears to be that, although they are engaged in many activities, they do not find them particularly rewarding. It might be observed that at this stage in life one finds it nearly impossible to find contentment because some major needs are suspended and cry out for fulfillment. Teenagers could hardly be expected to have resolved their tensions concerning a life's vocation or to have channeled their sex drives into a happy, satisfying love life. Neither could they be expected to have arrived at a state of mature Christian faith that has resulted in a healthy value system and synthesized the diverse teachings of the Hebrew-Christian traditions and the secular scientific concepts they absorb in the public educational system.

### Teenage Dilemmas

Even in their day-by-day decisions young people must choose options and take serious risks.

Gloria felt that she could not live without Jim. She described him as a warm, caring human being. He was handsome, personable, and easy going with many friends at school and in the community. But Jim got into trouble with the law. An undercover policeman identified him as a distributor in a marijuana ring in the high school.

Gloria was with him when he was arrested. Jim was tried and sent to jail. Gloria was given a suspended sentence because she and Jim were able to convince the judge that she was not involved. She was assigned to a professional counselor for a series of sessions with regular reports to her parole officer.

Joe is the smallest member of his gang and has the wit and energy often associated with a person of his stature. His friends love to have him around to see what he will dream up next. His teachers and church leaders find his charm hard to resist and, in the words of one, "let him get away with murder." But one day he was taken to the mental health clinic because his stash of marijuana had been located, along with a handful of medicine bottles containing an assortment of minor tranquilizers and amphetamines. Joe's parents placed him under the care of a psychologist, and he is still being seen regularly.

Louise was persuaded to spend a Saturday night in a fraternity house. She is a very pretty girl who is mildly retarded. Because her parents were so deeply embarrassed when the affair became public knowledge, they sought no help.

Lonny reacted with his fists when his father tried to respond to his verbal abuse. His mother finally called the sheriff's office. When the local deputy had him under restraint, he was taken to the mental health center and diagnosed as schizophrenic.

Larry has come to realize that he is homosexual and is struggling with the question of whether he should tell his parents. He is undecided whether he should seek professional help and has grave doubts that he can or needs to be helped.

Diane, a shy, retiring girl, somewhat obese, with a beautiful complexion and lovely brown eyes, has no ambitions and very few friends. Although her grades were low, she graduated from high school last year. But she has almost become a recluse in her room. Her mother and father are very concerned but have no idea where to turn. She went to a therapist over a period of time but refused to accept another one when he left the community.

Do these cases sound extreme and their numbers few? They are not. The persons and incidents are very real; most of them exist in a single, small community; and all of these cases, along with many

others, are in the files of one counselor. The majority of these young people are members of churches and are regular in attendance.

### Areas of Counseling

Although there are many Larrys, Dianas, Louises, and Joes, most teenagers fall in the normal category.

Bill, an intelligent, hard-working young man, is concerned with keeping his grade average high and with locating a college that will prepare him to enter medical school.

Judy, a vivacious, personable junior, has an abundance of energy and is planning to enter the seminary to prepare for a ministry in youth or children's education on a church staff. But she can't decide whether to combine her vocational plans with a decision to marry.

Russ and Debby have gone steady since the eighth grade. During the last two years their relationship has become more intimate, and two months ago they began having sexual relations. Russ tries to deny his feelings of guilt, but finds himself unable to go back to the previous relationship. Debby cannot deny Russ, and her need for emotional intimacy is as great as his. Both feel tense and fear they will be discovered and confronted by their parents. They feel guilty because their church teaches that premarital sex is a sin. Apart, they suffer with their negative feelings; together, they share their pain and comfort each other with rationalizations and emotional support. They cannot decide whether to continue their present relationship, to discuss their dilemma with their parents, or to get married secretly.

The general areas of counseling fall into two categories: vocational-educational and personal-social. The first relates to what to do in life; the second deals with how to live a life. Schools are designed to prepare an individual to become educated and to get ready for a vocation. Homes and churches are presumed to be responsible for teaching adolescents how to live successfully. Unfortunately, in a society in transition, the limitations of the basic institutions are evident. They become obsolete and out of step or, for many reasons, fail to accomplish their tasks. The task definition for the school has been altogether too narrow, it appears. The young person is a complete entity; and while he is getting an education and

preparing at school for a vocation, he is also formulating a basic philosophy and developing a life-style. The educator who adopts a secular stance in order not to influence the students religiously has only succeeded in modeling for them a secular point of view.

Personal-social problems are generally expressed in social conduct and relationships between the sexes.

### **Developmental Tasks of Adolescents**

Consider the broader demands for personal adjustment outlined by Robert J. Havighurst in his developmental tasks for adolescents.<sup>1</sup> In previous generations a young person identified himself by his life's work, his sex, his religion, and his socioeconomic status. No longer are teenagers involved directly in helping the family economically. In the main they will bypass manual labor in order to develop a technical skill that will allow them to enter into the automated world of today or to prepare for a profession. From an era when work was valued and children a blessing, they are growing up in a world in which the moral value of work has greatly decreased and children are generally viewed as liabilities rather than assets.

Apart, then, from the traditional ways of self-identification, one must go about the formation of identity without reference to vocation. Also, there are strong trends toward eliminating sex as an important aspect of identity. The youth is pressured to lay aside religious concepts and to ignore socioeconomic status. With due consideration for the dangers of discrimination, is it any wonder that the youth of this era, more than those of previous generations, suffers from identity diffusion of crisis proportions? (See chapter 1.)

In spite of the cultural changes today, society, family, and the individual himself require that certain developmental tasks be completed in order for the youth to be considered a functioning adult. It is in the struggles of youth to accomplish these tasks that they encounter problems. The counselor should be familiar with the tasks and goals one must pursue in reaching maturity. In summary form, the tasks are as follows:

1. Every adolescent must learn to view girls as women and boys as men. He must also learn how to work with his own and the opposite sex for the good of all. Equally important is the need to



learn how to control personal feelings and to develop the ability to exert leadership without dominating.

2. The adolescent must accept and feel comfortable with his or her masculine or feminine social role. While the traditional role concepts are changing, one's basic self-concept demands a clear sexual identity and social role.

3. The adolescent must adapt to his own body and learn to use it effectively. This task will require that he accept its shape, its strong points, and its limitations, and that he observe the rules of good health, including proper nourishment, regular exercise, and a sensible schedule of sleep.

4. The young person must also develop enough autonomy to become relatively free from an emotional dependence upon his parents. This does not mean that his affection for them will decrease; indeed, it may well increase. Affection derives from a mutual respect between parents and their young people as autonomous individuals of different generations.

5. Youth is the time to develop a positive view of marriage and family life. This involves attitudes toward children and the development of skills in parental effectiveness and in home management.

6. The young person must prepare himself for a career in a highly complex industrial world. His ability to formulate a viable vocational goal and to organize his life to meet its educational requirements will have a great influence upon his view of himself and his place in society.

7. The adolescent will acquire a set of moral values and develop an ethical system of one kind or another. For good or for ill, he will formulate an ideology which may or may not be effective in guiding him to cope with moral problems and to make ethical decisions. (See chapter 5.)

8. During teenage years an individual develops personal responsibility. At this time he determines the degree of his adherence to the values of his society and the level of his own involvement.

Later in life the youth will reevaluate, revise, and adjust to the demands of each task; but much of the spadework is done during the teen years. In a few cases dramatic changes occur later in life, but in

the vast majority of cases the views and conduct of the adolescent, with further refinement and amplification, remain constant throughout life.

### **Coping Skills for Daily Living**

The coping skills a youth develops in seeking to fulfill his developmental tasks are determined by several factors. Such factors as mental ability, physical appearance, emotional maturity, and social competence are significant. They in turn are determined by his genetic heritage, the modeling of parents and other significant adults, and the prevailing social values of his peers. From the pressures built up by society and self to accomplish tasks, a set of attitudes begins to emerge. The degree to which these attitudes correspond with his conduct will vary greatly from person to person.

1. Sexual feelings, sexual relations, and attitudes toward sex are a constant source of problems. Such problems evolve around questions about masturbation, dating, premarital sex, and postmarital sexual adjustment.

2. The use of drugs, alcohol, and tobacco can be a source of problems for youth. They may have resolved the question of whether to participate and to have determined frequency and amounts, only to discover that some of the side effects and social results are counterproductive. Often the young person will seek help in coping with the results while at the same time denying the cause-and-effect sequence of his habits. The greatest damage from the use of drugs may be their interference with his accomplishment of the developmental tasks.

3. Other social patterns, such as gambling and cheating in school, may come in for social, group, and individual evaluation.

4. The forms of recreation can influence youth development and are generally a source of conflict with parents.

5. The process by which one may gain popularity or notoriety is a ripe area for breeding problems that call for counseling.

Counseling of adolescents in the area of religion has to do with personal spiritual growth and covers such subjects as conversion, prayer, worship, temptation, and personal commitment. For example, many young people have made professions of faith at an early

age, but later have questioned their earlier decision. After personal introspection and counseling, some decide that they did not have a valid experience. At this point they generally make a public profession of faith and are baptized. Others come to the conclusion that they sincerely responded to God in faith at their earlier maturity level. They decide generally to make a public rededication at their near-adult maturity level. (See chapter 7.)

### Principles and Procedures in Counseling Youth

Good counseling can only come about when the counselor and young person develop an atmosphere in which both feel comfortable. The purpose of a counseling interview is neither simply to answer a problem nor to find a solution. Its purpose, instead, is to develop a skill on the part of the counselee by which he may be able to learn how to resolve his own problems. The counseling atmosphere must have at least three elements.

*Positive regard.* The counselor is primarily responsible for developing interpersonal relationships with the young person that leave no doubt in his mind that he is welcome and that the counselor is not assuming a parent relationship to him. The counselee must be seen as a person who has the ability to resolve his own problems and to take a positive direction in his own self-development. The positive regard of the counselor is expressed through his eyes, the tone of his voice, and the expression of warmth toward the young person throughout each session.

*Empathy.* As a young person begins to express his feelings and deal with his problem, the counselor begins to identify with him and feel the tensions and anxieties that have built up as a result of his problem. Emotionally and even mentally, the counselor feels that he almost stands in his counselee's shoes.

*Confidential nature of the material.* By clear statement the counselor should let it be known that whatever transpires is private and that the information belonging to the counselee will not be divulged without his permission.

Youth workers sometimes express a certain amount of bewilderment over the fact that they are not often called upon for counseling with youth. Close attention to the atmosphere of counseling may

hold the answer. If only one of the elements is missing, the possibility for counseling in an effective manner is destroyed. The person who is too busy to empathize, who is too preoccupied to give positive regard and acceptance, or who carelessly reveals information that has been given in private will find that young people can be unforgiving and that their relationship can be quickly terminated.

### **The Counseling Interview**

*Attention.* The counselor must give careful attention to the counselee. At the same time he is listening to what the counselee says, he will need to observe his body motions and give close attention to his eyes and facial muscles. This requires a great deal of skill in listening. The fact is that some young people have never had an adult to give complete and undivided attention to what they had to say.

*Permission.* The counselor must allow a young person to express himself without reservation. In many cases learning the information he shares will be like looking into a person's innermost thoughts. The teenager is not guarded and is not passing judgment upon what he says, but is giving and sharing all that he has discovered in the secrets of his own mind and feelings. For this reason, anything goes. This means that the counselor will not judge, will not show shock, and will not argue. Judgments or arguments can destroy or terminate counseling in the early stages of the session.

*Respect.* The feelings of the young person should be respected and in many cases will need to be clarified. This means that much of the time, the feelings come out in the form of expressions that are emotional and confused. Clarification for the young person as well as the counselor is helpful at this point. A statement like "If I understand, what you are saying is \_\_\_\_\_" or "You are saying that you feel \_\_\_\_\_" is helpful. At no time should the counselor express a negative response indicating that the young person should not feel the way he says he feels. His feelings must be respected, whatever they are. Only after delving into his emotional responses to situations and people can he truly know the effect they are having upon himself.

*Problem Solving.* Identify the problem with regard to the cause.

This often calls for probing or opening with questions in which the young person gives more and more information. Layers of feelings and responses are laid bare until the cause is discovered. The fact that a person has identified the cause of the problem does not mean, however, that the problem is solved. Problem solving requires a consideration of alternatives. This means that there are occasions when the young person has misinterpreted or has based his assumptions and responses on faulty logic. It is surprising how many adults carry inadequate or immature thinking throughout their lives and have not used their rational ability to describe and analyze their problems. Another alternative is referral if the problem seems too great. At no point should the counselor indicate that this is a procedure by which he can rid himself of the time and trouble it takes to do counseling. In each case it should be mutually decided that someone else has more of the skill or information needed for the young person in his dilemma.

In considering alternatives by which a person can make decisions, the counselor should introduce Christian considerations, including faith in God and prayer if the time and the response of the person is appropriate.

A proven way of handling alternative possibilities is the pro-con method of decision making. In this very simple approach the counselor leads the counselee to consider the factors that would be in favor of one of the alternatives chosen for consideration and all of the factors that would be against it. One method of doing this is to write the problem at the top of a sheet of paper, and on one side factors for and on the other side those against. By this means a person can readily see the factors that would be in favor of that solution and, in contrast, the factors that would be against it.

*Technique.* The technique of responding to the young person is to listen carefully and to reflect. Reflection means that the counselor will continue to indicate to the young person that he is reading his feelings. This is somewhat like holding up a mirror in which he can see his own reactions to the problem.

*Background Information.* The counselor will attempt to gain as much information about the young person as possible. A part of the session can be well spent in asking questions and in discovering



background information.

Many times a young person will approach the counselor with superficial problems. These pseudo problems are intended to find out how well the counselor can handle something that is not really significant to the counselee. After the period of testing, he will then share what is really uppermost in his mind.

Young people who are conditioned to quick remedies and television shows in which the problem is solved in thirty minutes or one hour come to the counselor expecting an immediate and simple solution. It may take a while for them to realize that there are no easy answers and no shortcuts to personal growth. The counselor himself is sometimes tempted to find simple solutions. This reveals itself in his attempt to give advice, to preach. We need to remind ourselves constantly that the young person is not here to answer one problem, but rather to develop the skill of problem solving.

Indeed, in the process of counseling the young person will find that he will go over the same material time and again, puzzling, seeking answers, and trying to understand. This calls for patience on the part of the counselor and persistence on the part of the young person.

*Structuring.* The temptation will often arise for the counselor to spend too much time in a counseling session. While going over an hour or even up to an hour and a half is acceptable under critical circumstances, to go far beyond an hour and a half is likely to be counterproductive. The counselor will need to explain to the counselee exactly the amount of time that he has available. It should be at a time when both are free to devote their undivided attention to the counseling process. Much of the time is spent in allowing the young person to ventilate. This means that he will freely express his feelings and frustrations. The counselor will find himself coping with expressions of anger and, on some occasions, tears.

During the process of counseling, projection often occurs. The young person will become angry at the counselor, as he may have been in the habit of becoming angry at other adults in his life. He may blame the counselor for things which are not his fault. In many cases, he is unable to determine just why he became so angry with this adult who is making every effort to help him with his problem.

On the other extreme, he is apt to become very emotionally attached to the counselor. This is normal and should be handled with maturity, consideration, and thoughtfulness. In cases where the counselee is of the opposite sex, it is especially important that the counselor be able to relate in a way that will maintain the respect of the individual without encouraging the deepening of dependency.

The final goal of the counseling process should be kept in mind at all times. Self-understanding and self-acceptance are vital to the youth's ability to understand and deal with his problems. More importantly, his sense of self-esteem will determine the measure and level of his growth and maturity.

*Terminating.* Eventually the young person becomes comfortable enough with his decision to become independent from the counselor. At this time the counselor can make the young person feel free to return for other sessions if the need arises.

*Referring.* The counselor would be well advised to refer the young person to someone else when the circumstances call for it.

Certainly if the counselee shows symptoms of mental illness, professional help should be found. This is a sensitive but critical move. Usually the advice and support of a professional would be required before such a transfer can be made. Symptoms of mental illness appear in abnormal ways of thinking and acting by the counselee.

1. He may hear voices that no one else can hear.
2. He may see people or things that simply do not exist.
3. He may become very withdrawn and not respond to people or events around him.
4. He may reverse his way of expressing himself. For example, a quiet person, when ill, may become extremely happy and boisterous. Or a peaceful person may become angry and aggressive.
5. He may become confused and unable to know where he is or who people are, including himself.
6. He may offer grandiose schemes or claim to be a famous or well-known person.
7. He may feel that everyone is plotting against him and that others are trying to hurt or kill him.
8. He may complain of bad odors or a foul taste in his mouth.

9. He may think that his body has changed its form; that some of his parts, such as his head, arms, or legs, are not connected to his trunk; or that he is coming completely apart.

10. He may repeat acts in a ritualistic way, such as washing hands or turning around in a prescribed way before seating himself.

11. He may laugh at nothing and fail to laugh at what others consider funny.

12. His eating habits may change radically. He may refuse food.

13. He may not sleep but spend the nights and days in restless movement.

14. His language may become nonsensical, consisting of garbled sounds or meaningless words and phrases.

15. He may appear to have no feelings at all. He may appear sad and listless.

16. He may become suspicious of and angry at the people closest to him. Normal people show many of these symptoms in mild forms. The mentally ill or psychotic person experiences them to a much greater degree.

The neurotic young person may also need referral. The most obvious difference between him and the psychotic person is the degree of insight. The psychotic is so preoccupied with the extreme activity going on inside his brain that he relates primarily to a very private and individual world. He does not consider himself insane but thinks that other people simply do not understand his world. The neurotic, on the other hand, is excruciatingly aware of his suffering and cries out for relief. He seeks to relate to the real world, only to find that the experience is painful and exhausting. The counselor can do much to help the neurotic. He may find, however, that his expertise and patience have reached their limits and that he must call upon someone else whose training and experience would contribute to his efforts.

Referral skill requires that a counselor know the resources available in a community. For example, a knowledge of the mental health programs and personnel in the area would be needed.

Other problem areas call for further information about community resources.

Who will help a youth find a summer job?

Who can help him discover his abilities and interests in regard to a life's vocation?

Who can help a transient youth with food and lodging?

Who will help a youth on drugs or who shows signs of alcoholism?

Who can help when a youth's relations with his parents have deteriorated and the problem is beyond the skill of the counselor?

Who can help a youth who needs instruction on clothes and grooming?

Who can help a youth in trouble with the law, who is unable to hire a lawyer?

Who will give tests and treatment to a youth who suspects that he has venereal disease?

Who can help youth (girls and boys) involved in pregnancy when parental help is not adequate?

### Records

Good records are important in counseling. While they may serve to jog the memory, they are valuable in evaluating the problem and in organizing the procedure of counseling. The following guidelines are suggested.

*Background Information.* An information sheet should be filled out on each counselee. The counselor can fill out the sheet in preparation for or after the first session, or he can have the young person do so. This sheet should have the date and the person's name, age, sex, address, and telephone number. It should also record his school grade and/or place of employment and duties. It should include his family size, socioeconomic status, a description of the parents and siblings, and the position of the young person in his family. Other pertinent information, such as medical history and difficulties at school, at home, or in the community is also needed.

*Present Problem.* A concise statement of why the young person came for counseling can help to clarify the need and set the pattern for counseling.

*Problem List.* In addition to the problem for which counseling was initiated, one will generally find a number of other problems. For example, if a youth is having problems with his teachers, his grades might be affecting his eligibility for sports; or he might be at odds

with his girl friend. Other symptoms might also appear, such as a tendency to drink or smoke marijuana as an escape. Also, he should be questioned and observed for evidences of any physical problems or a poor regimen as to rest, nourishment, and exercise.

*Progress Notes.* A record of each session should be kept in the form of notes. Several systems are available such as verbatim, anecdotal, or a brief summary. One of the simplest and best approaches is to analyze each problem that was dealt with in a simple outline as follows:

**SUBJECTIVE:** A paragraph is written in which the counselor reports how the youth sees himself in relation to the particular problem.

**OBJECTIVE:** This paragraph contains a description of how others, including the counselor, see the young person in regard to the problem.

**ANALYSIS:** This paragraph consists of a description of the dynamics of the problem with whatever interpretative insights the counselor may bring to bear upon them.

**PROCEDURE:** Finally, the counselor describes the steps that he plans to follow in helping the young person cope with his problem.

After a counseling relationship has been terminated, a final summary should be placed in the young person's file and should contain a brief history and the reason for termination.

### **Personal Factors in Counseling**

Nearly every counselor will concede that the most important counseling tool he owns is himself. Techniques are important and skills are essential, but personal adjustment is more significant in achieving success.

Emotionally, the counselor must be well adjusted and relatively free of wide swings from elation to depression. His ability to respond warmly to his counselee must be balanced by good judgment, moral fiber, and the ability to remain loyal to personal commitments. Too many Christian counselors have become emotionally and sexually involved with vulnerable persons who have come for help. Nearly always the intention of the counselor was good, but the fact remains that he was not personally prepared for the task. He must learn to accept as a matter of course the transference of love



and affection, of hatred and suspicion. It is not easy to become the target for anger or the object of love and remain stable and balanced while maintaining a caring relationship. The counselor must do this successfully, however, if he is to counsel at all.

Socially, the counselor must remain open, approachable, and available. He is expected to establish times and places he may be seen and to let the youth know how he can be reached when the need is especially urgent. His attitude of friendliness does more to declare his availability than any other kind of communication.

The counselor's willingness to hear any and every kind of problem and to respect the young person regardless of how he is handling it is essential to establishing rapport. Young people equate moral judgment as rejection and respond with anger and withdrawal. Acceptance of the person, on the other hand, does not signify approval of his actions.

The development of tolerance requires a reassessment of one's biases and a willingness to make philosophical and emotional adjustments in depth. Consider, for example, the areas of counseling in which the counselor might have emotional hang-ups. The religiously oriented are likely to find sex to be a most difficult subject. At the same time, this is a most troublesome area to youth. They are physically mature and capable of mating, but not ready for marriage. The sex drive is at its peak; and, to many young people, there appears to be no socially approved sexual outlet. The counselor must be prepared to deal with the youth who masturbates, the one who is promiscuous, and the homosexual, as well as those concerned with the usual moral issues surrounding dating.

In the realm of religion, the counselor may be called upon to counsel some who espouse one of the Oriental methods of meditation or those who are obsessed with the charismatic movement and speak in tongues. He may be approached by the youth who is certain that he has committed the unpardonable sin or one who is psychotic and is under the care of a therapist. In each case he is expected to relate to the person with Christian care and professional skill. If he fails in either of these, let it be at the point of professional skill.

A healthy interest in other persons and a concern for their welfare

is the Christian basis for counseling. A preoccupation with morbid details evidences unresolved problems on the part of the counselor and detracts from his ability to deal with the real issues at hand. Experience in counseling will convince the counselor that very few things are unique enough to surprise him; and sooner or later he develops the ability to see even bizarre things in their true perspective. At the same time he will need to become even more sensitive to the cry of the counselee for help.

An assessment of each counselee includes a knowledge and an understanding of the characteristics of his age level. Excellent work has been done on age-level traits by such men as Havighurst, Erikson, and Gesell. The writings of these men and others should be researched for an understanding of developmental tasks, age-level characteristics, and studies of their behavior patterns. The counselor must be aware of the unique personality of each young person as well as the traits he holds in common with his age-mates.

The counselor is able to inspire courage and optimism in young people to the degree that he reflects those qualities in his own life. Probably the most pressing need of young people is for encouragement and hope. Consequently, it would be difficult to overestimate the power to bless that the counselor holds in his hands.

Finally, the counselor must possess the willingness, the time, and the emotional energy required to counsel. He must often sacrifice his personal preferences in the interest of troubled youth. Only time will reveal the strength of his influence, however, should he choose to devote himself to the development of a skillful ministry of counseling with members of the oncoming generation of Christian young people.

### Note

1. Robert J. Havighurst, *Developmental Tasks and Education* (New York: David McKay Co., 1973), pp. 43-82.

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## Youth and the Affirmation of Faith

G. Temp Sparkman

Identity is the major task of adolescence, but the most important decision that youth will make is the affirmation of faith. People of faith have long believed that apart from understanding our relationship to God, there can be no complete self-understanding. Leading theologians through the years have expressed such a conviction, suggesting that the life of faith is the fully human existence, the complete life. This chapter is built on the assumption that the affirmation of faith is closely related to the dynamics of the identity quest.

The term *affirmation of faith* has a special meaning in this discussion. It is not exactly the same thing as what is meant by persons who use such phrases as profession of faith, conversion, confirmation, or accepting Jesus. It includes all of these, but it is broader than any one of them.

Affirmation of faith involves two elements: an appraisal of the heritage and a declaration of personal faith. Thus it incorporates both the dynamics of the profession of faith, as practiced in evangelical churches, and something of the assumptions behind confirmation, as practiced in liturgical churches. My hope is that, regardless of the theological viewpoint from which you come, you will see that these two elements make up the ideal way for children to come to a self-assumed faith.

### The Dimensions of Affirmation

Before examining the two basic elements in the affirmation of faith, let us look at some dimensions of affirmation. Apart from the substance of the affirmation of faith, what can be said about affirmation itself?

For one thing, affirmation is voluntary. It is the result of personal

response. To affirm is to say yes to something or someone. To affirm is to respond favorably to something we have encountered or experienced. No one can affirm something for us, for we alone can will something for ourselves. Others can want something for us and can attempt to force or influence us toward that something. But only we can affirm that something for ourselves.

From early childhood the individual will develops, and we become more independent as we gain ego strength. We become persons in the fullest sense when we are capable, to a reasonable degree, of making choices on our own. Of course, we can never become completely independent of others. That would be undesirable even if it were possible. And there is a sense in which we are more aware of dependence on God as we grow older. So we are not talking here about a person who has an overexaggerated sense of independence, but about one with an identity strong enough to make a decision and to assume personal responsibility for it.

A second dimension of affirmation is that the power to affirm is a gift of God. The God who made us also chose out of his own autonomy to make us free beings—free to follow, free to go our own way, free to love, free to reject. To be sure, our autonomous choices are not without their consequences; but they are free and unencumbered.

This leads to a third dimension—namely that, while free, we are influenced by others. How many of us could explain our own personal faith apart from the influence of Christian men and women who brought us up in the faith? These influences have varied from loving to coercive, but their power cannot be denied. No doubt some of our decisions have been in response to an overbearing influence of a parent, a teacher, a pastor, or a friend. However, the more fulfilling and long-lasting decisions are those made out of the loving influence of sympathetic adults who have surrounded us with religious nurture.

Another aspect of affirmation is that it cannot be the automatic result of educational process. There is much that education can do for us, much that it can prepare us for, much that it can lead us toward. However, education stops short of making decisions for us. Just as others cannot make choices for us, neither can the educa-



tional process make choices for us. It can lead to but cannot affirm faith in Jesus Christ. Faith is much too personal for the educational process to be able to assure that we will appropriate it for ourselves.

A final dimension of affirmation is that it is radical but not necessarily cataclysmic. When we affirm faith we are doing something radical—that is to say, something that will affect our lives totally. From medical experience we know that radical surgery means surgery that is going to have a pervasive effect as well as an inherent aspect of high risk. The affirmation of faith is that way. It cannot be a mere formalized response to education or the result of having attained a certain age. No, it is far more radical, for it influences all of our other decisions and relationships.

### Two Elements in the Affirmation of Faith

We know that the affirmation of faith is approached according to various theologies. Some churches baptize their children when they are infants and then confirm them in the faith at some time in late childhood or in the youth years. Other churches do not baptize their children until the children make professions of faith. Such profession and baptism may happen at various ages during childhood or youth, or they may not occur until adulthood.

The position of this chapter is that the affirmation of faith is a far richer experience than can be explained simply by the terms *profession of faith* or *confirmation*. Both of these terms do, of course, have their own deep meanings. The following discussion attempts to explain those meanings and to blend them into a single term, *affirmation of faith*.

An affirmation of faith has two complementary, inseparable elements—an appraisal of the heritage and a declaration of faith. Both elements are essential if the youth is to experience the full meaning of affirming faith. If one element is taken seriously and the other lightly, the youth will have a distorted understanding of what it means to take up the faith for oneself.

#### Element 1: the Heritage Appraisal

The affirmation of faith includes an appraisal of the heritage in which youth have been nurtured. This appraisal is a journey back

through childhood in an attempt to remember what the church has already done for youth. It is looking back over the teachings that formed their early education. It is an attempt to get in touch with the feelings that surrounded the warm environment in which they were nurtured.

This journey that is necessary in making an appraisal of the heritage will be different from church to church, but its aim is the same. In the liturgical churches the appraisal is a reminder to youth of the baptismal vows made in their behalf in infancy. It may also be a reminder of the time in childhood when they first took communion. In such churches this aspect is already provided in the confirmation rite, during which youth are asked to accept the pledges made in their behalf when they were too young to do so for themselves.

In the evangelical tradition there are no infant baptismal rites. However, an increasing number of churches are sponsoring what are generally known as dedication services. In such services the parents are reminded of the privileges and responsibilities of parenthood, and the church is challenged to surround the child with love and right teaching. Youth who have been a part of such services can be told what was said and done in their behalf. Where no services of this kind have been provided, youth can be told of the other things that have been done for them to ensure that they would grow up in the faith.

In all cases this backward look can include a review of some of the central teachings of the church, the kind of worship the church has celebrated, and some of the activities the church has sponsored. Some of those persons who taught the youth during childhood can be brought to these heritage appraisal sessions. This personal experience might evoke more help for the appraisal than would doctrines, the worship, and the activities.

The journey into the past is not, however, all there is to the process of appraising the heritage. Of equal importance is a study of the basic doctrines and character of the church. Regardless of the rites and teachings that made up their childhood experience, youth are now ready for a new level of exposure to the church's teachings. Their new cognitive ability (see chapter 3) will make it possible for

them to grasp deeper meanings, and the search for identity (see chapter 1) will cause them to recognize subtleties that childhood experience did not include.

Some of the themes to be studied are God, the life and work of Jesus Christ, the meaning and mission of the church, and the meaning of sin, faith, and commitment.

Such a study may take several directions, but the most fruitful will begin with how youth presently understand these themes. Since it is a personal faith that we are aiming toward, it is only right that we begin by reviewing what the youth understand rather than by telling them what they are supposed to believe. The author once approached such a study by leading the youth to formulate a confession of faith. We began by looking at some historic creeds and confessions, then began working on our own. We produced a very meaningful statement of faith.

While the focus of the sessions will be on what the youth believe, leaders will likely teach the youth some aspects of these doctrines and themes. It does become important to teach youth about beliefs that they themselves might not personally hold to. This is a realistic practice because the faith belongs to a community of believers, and that community takes on a certain theological character. It would be deceptive to allow youth to look at their heritage without telling them the entire story.

Most denominational publishing houses have curriculum materials that can be used in the appraisal of the heritage. These materials can be utilized as they are or adapted to fit a particular situation. Enterprising leaders can create their own sessions.

The hope for all of this remembering and this discussion of doctrine and character is that our youth will affirm the heritage. There is no more fulfilling moment for parents than when their children say, "This heritage is mine. What you have been doing for me I wish to continue in." At such a high point parents and teachers are rewarded for their faithful instruction and patient guidance.

Affirming the heritage, however, does not constitute the whole of an affirmation of faith. Besides looking at the heritage and affirming it, there is also an element of having personal faith in Jesus Christ that transcends the heritage. This element is the declaration of

personal faith. Let us describe and analyze such a declaration.

### **Element 2: the Declaration of Personal Faith**

The affirmation of faith is made complete when the declaration of personal faith is joined with the appraisal of the heritage.

The heritage has been looked at; the doctrine of the church has been reexamined; and youth have chosen to continue in that heritage and with the church family which holds that doctrine. But this much, while indispensable, does not amount to personal faith. Therefore, something more is needed. Beyond the identification with what has been done in their behalf, youth have to assume the faith for themselves. In the liturgical tradition youth have to take the baptismal vows upon themselves, not merely accept them ceremoniously.

This declaration is in a sense only one in a long series, although, as we shall see, it is unique in adolescent experience. Interwoven throughout the education and nurture of children has been the necessity of some personal decisions about the meaning of Jesus Christ, about commitment to some Christian causes, and about ethical alternatives. In these decisions children are trusting and committing and choosing rightly. When children pray in times of fear, they are trusting. When they join in some worthy project or minister to someone, they are committing themselves to the Christ. When in the face of an ethical dilemma they choose rightly, they are doing what Christians do.

Yet, these decisions added together do not constitute the full meaning of a declaration of personal faith. This full meaning has waited upon adolescence. This personal decision, made sometime during the youth years, has an existential involvement and a futuristic element not fully present in the early, more intuitive and concrete decisions. More of selfhood is involved, and more of a future commitment is possible at this time. To see what this "more" is, we will need to return to earlier discussions. Inhelder and Piaget (see chapter 3) suggested that one of the distinguishing characteristics of adolescence over childhood is the adoption of a life plan, a kind of model that turns the adolescent toward adulthood. In their thought the life plan is one of the elements responsible for the development



of formal reasoning. It is more than a vocational choice and certainly more complex than childhood fantasies about certain careers. This notion of a life plan has roots in the writing of a German psychologist, Eduard Spranger, who believed it to involve a very idealistic life philosophy and emphasis on the future.<sup>1</sup>

Chapter 1 focused on the search for identity as the major task of adolescence. We saw in that discussion that the adolescent ego is trying to find a new strength, based in some balance between the negative and positive forces that pull on it. When these pulls are brought under control there is a fidelity, an inner resonance that gives the youth a base from which to handle experience. When the pulls are not mastered, there is confusion of identity; and the youth are left without anchorage. Of course, life cannot be fully mastered at so young an age, but it is possible for enough of a stability to be established to mark a flowering identity that is going to hold under fairly normal conditions. The identity is always subject to threats that it cannot handle, as witnessed in the breakup of stable personalities during divorce, death in the family, or other crises.

This discussion is not to say that personality identity and religious identity are the same. It does, however, raise the perplexing question as to whether the personality identity can be truly complete without the religious dimension. For our purposes we are more concerned with whether religious identity is possible apart from the dynamics of personality identity in adolescence. Can a person face seriously the challenges of a personal declaration of faith apart from the questions of selfhood that make up the identity quest?

It is the author's belief that the very pulls of the identity crisis are the mix out of which personal faith is most likely to be born. As youth face the deepest questions of selfhood, they are at last prepared to face also the meaning that faith brings to personality. The unity sought in the identity struggle seems elusive, and youth look for a unifying reality. They can find that reality in what the church has told them about Jesus Christ and themselves.

In the liturgical tradition the youth have always been told that they are a part of the church and are children of God because of their baptism. Now, at this disruptive time in their experience, they sense a discrepancy between who the church has told them they are



and what they feel about their relation to God. For all of their feeling about being children of God, there still exists an obscuring of that relationship; and it cannot be seen so clearly. In this tradition this process reveals the awful face of sin. Though they are children of God, they feel some measure of alienation from the Father.

In the evangelical tradition youth have been told since early childhood that they are sinners and outside the family of God. Now in the identity crisis they see the same face of sin, the same one the youth of the liturgical tradition see. While they had been told all along that they were sinners, their consciousness of sinfulness was vague and foreboding. Now, in their youth years, they can understand what was meant.

Regardless of the tradition out of which the youth have come, regardless of the beauty and integrity of the heritage, the condition is the same. For the first time youth see that the unity they are seeking is elusive. It is here that the elusiveness and the alienation are interpreted as the result of sin. Sin is seen not merely as that which can be reduced to a listing of sins, faults, or wrongdoings, but as an obscuring, disintegrating force working against the distinctiveness of the image of God in which all have been created.

Youth come to a time when they sense that more is wrong in their existence than history, doctrine, worship, or community ethos and ethic can solve.

This is not the first time youth have heard of sin, for it has been talked about in many settings in the church and home. It is, however, the first time in life that they have been able to grasp the full meaning of sin and to make some personal decision about sinfulness and the meaning of Jesus Christ. It is not the first time youth have heard of Jesus Christ, for they have heard much about him as Savior—in the hymns, prayers, and preaching of the church. And while they remember having followed the teachings of Jesus as best they could, it is the first time that they can grasp fully the real import of the redemptive work of the Christ.

This new ability is what was discussed in chapter 3 concerning cognitive processes. You will remember that the child was characterized as a concrete-bound thinker, unable to perform formal operations or to manipulate data abstractly, apart from concrete experi-

ence. In that chapter a new kind of thinker was characterized as one who could understand abstractions, do second-order thinking, and think about thought. The concept of sinfulness is an abstraction, a generalization. To be sure, sin itself is very concrete; but sinfulness is an abstraction. It cannot be explained merely by adding up all of the concrete instances of sin that one can imagine.

To limit our understanding of sinfulness to one or more concrete sins and to hold persons responsible for those would mean that preschool children would be responsible for sin. And to hold to sinfulness as an accumulation of sins would raise the question as to when a person has accumulated enough sins to be considered sinful and therefore responsible. This leaves us with a concept of sin that has to be generalized from concrete instances. We have already employed such terms as alienation, obscurity, disunity, disintegration.

The understanding of such a concept requires a formal thinker who can look at the fact and fruit of sin and perceive a condition, an uncontrollable force, an awry dimension of personhood. Such a level of thinking is an adolescent, not a childhood, realization. This can be illustrated by what some children said when they were asked, "What is sin?" A six-year-old said, "A sin is what gets you into more trouble than you know what to do with." A seven-year-old introduced the idea that there are degrees of mistakes and that sin is the worst degree: "A sin is a really bad mistake. When you make a little mistake, your parents punish you. But when you make a sin, God punishes you. And I bet he can really spank." A nine-year-old suggested that there are degrees of sin: "A sin is when you disrespect the law of God. There are big sins and little sins. Like when you beat up your sisters . . . that's a middle-sized one." Ronald Goldman found that only from the age of twelve years, eight months, and up was there an understanding of "evil as a propensity within every person." A girl aged thirteen, four months said of the devil, "It's the evil spirit in us all." <sup>2</sup>

The great hope we have for our youth is that they will see themselves as inextricably bound up in the defection common to all persons, realize that the work of Jesus Christ is to show them the way out of that sin, and declare personal faith in him. In some

theological families this experience is called conversion. In other families it is known as confirmation. In some cases it might be thought of as one of many conversion experiences already had and yet to come, but pivotal and giving more of a direction to a person's life.

To be a genuine declaration it must, however, go beyond a mere emotional experience, a repeating of baptismal promises, a character-setting decision, or an automatic culmination of an educational process. It must be a deliberate, self-made declaration that what Jesus did is now being personally appropriated. It is thus emotional; it does relate to earlier pledges; it does affect the character; and it speaks well of education. But it is more than any or all of these.

### Summary

The youth has examined the heritage of faith and has said, "This heritage is mine. What you have been doing for me I wish to continue in." The youth has struggled with identity questions, has sensed an alienation from the God who makes things whole, and has said, "I confess my sinfulness and Jesus Christ as Savior"—or, as in some communions, "The vows made for me in baptism I now make my own."

Since such a decision will not be made immediately upon turning from childhood to youth or will not be a scheduled ceremony at which time all youth are expected to make a declaration, we who work with youth will need to be patient. This will not be easy, for there are times when events in the identity crisis seem to be working against an affirmation of faith. What looks like a flowering faith one day suddenly appears gone the next. Our anxiety during such times can be relieved only if we remember that we are witnessing an identity being born and that, just as in natural birth, there is some pain and risk.

To be sure, we cannot be detached from the travail, for much is at stake—the future of our children in the faith. Still, it is a personal decision, and there is nothing that we can do except what we have already done. We can continue to model and interpret the meaning of faith and support our youth as they find what that means for them.

The question comes: What about those youth who come to us without a background in the faith? Obviously these youth have no heritage to appraise; thus, the first element of the affirmation will be missing. But the second element, the declaration of personal faith, does not depend upon the first. Rather, it follows the person's own development and understanding of sin and belief. Once such youth come under our influence, however, they begin to understand the kind of faith community they have come to. Thus the meaning of a faith heritage will begin to be developed and will continue.

### Your Own View of This Issue

This chapter is the author's view of what is involved in a genuine affirmation of faith. Those of you who want to develop your own statement are referred to several resources that will be of assistance.

First, the issue probably has been debated within your denomination within the last twenty years. Your education and curriculum board will have papers and bibliographies of such discussions. In addition, some denominations have prepared materials that state an ideal for the movement of religious experience from infancy to adolescence.

Second, numerous books, booklets, and articles are available. See the journal *Religious Education*, published in New Haven, Connecticut, issues for September-October 1963 and July-August 1965. William E. Hull has an unpublished paper, "The Child and the Church." The dynamics of the religious experience of youth can be studied in *Adolescent Religion* by Charles W. Stewart (Abingdon). Lutheran publishing houses have a booklet, "Affirmation of the Baptismal Covenant." *The Nurture and Evangelism of Children* by Gideon G. Yoder (Herald) includes a chapter on adolescent experience.

Third, look at the bibliographies for chapters 1—5 of this book. Also, examine firsthand the research mentioned in chapter 4. Many have attempted to formulate a view of the affirmation of faith without listening seriously to what human development specialists have to say. Because it is persons that we are dealing with, psychology is of utmost importance.

Fourth, a study of psychology is not sufficient. The theology of sin

and belief, of Christology and personhood are of special significance. See the works of the major theologians and your denomination's articles or confessions of faith. In addition, it is probable that your denominational education and curriculum board has a statement of theological assumptions that underlie the preparation of curriculum materials.

Fifth, every resource will have a blind spot—some dimension missing, some reality seemingly distorted or ignored. This is where your own discipline of thinking will become important. Considering thoughtfully all of the information at hand, how will you put it all together? That is the question. If you attempt to create your own view, I hope that it will be as rewarding to you as it has been to me and that it will send you down as many exciting roads, still with miles to be traveled on each before the final destination can be seen or reached.

### Notes

1. Quoted by Rolf E. Muuss, *Theories of Adolescence* (Westminster, Maryland: Random House, 1966), p. 50.
2. Ronald Goldman, *Religious Thinking from Childhood to Adolescence* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1968), p. 174.



## Involving Youth in Worship and Learning

William R. Cromer, Jr.

The water of life and true worship are linked by the Gospel writer in John 4:7–26. Physical thirst requires continuous attention. Even so, thirsty souls must return again and again to the living water, like a panting hart searching for a water brook. Those who seek with all their being to worship God “in spirit and in truth” discover that their need for worship is matched by God’s affirmative action: “But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him” (v. 23, KJV).

The Father seeks youth to worship him.

### Worship: a Definition

The record of early Christian worship (begun before the record was written) is found chiefly in Acts and the epistles, with some suggestions in Revelation. W. D. Maxwell has pointed out that four factors were prominent in these experiences of worship: worship practices learned in synagogue and Temple, the *agape* or love feast, the Lord’s Supper, and prophesying or speaking in tongues. By A.D. 150 only the synagogue feature of Scripture reading and exposition “in a setting of praise and prayer” and the Supper remained.<sup>1</sup>

To define worship in a way agreeable to everyone would prove difficult. Nevertheless, its meaning needs clarification. First, *worship* is the English form of *worthship* and is derived from the Anglo-Saxon *weorthscipe*, meaning a state of worth or worthiness. Second, a working definition of Christian worship: Worship is the response of confession, adoration, praise, offering, and service to God through Jesus Christ, his Son.

*Acts of Worship:* It is *how* worship is to be accomplished that seems most often to divide Christians, especially adults and youth.

The distinctive character of meaningful worship for youth is that the *means* that may elicit a worship response are often different because youth are different developmentally and by social conditioning. For example, the editor of a religious paper objected to the music at an evangelism conference, while a young person testified that it “really spoke to me.” There are those who legitimately feel as Browning:

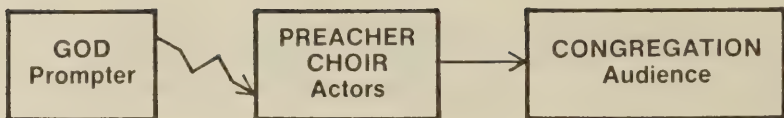
I then, in ignorance and weakness,  
Taking God's help, have attained to think  
My heart does best to receive in meekness  
That mode of worship, as most to his mind,  
Where earthly aids being cast behind,  
His All in All appears serene  
With the thinnest human veil between.<sup>2</sup>

Others agree with Marilee Zdenek and Marge Champion, who believe that worship should utilize all forms of art, spontaneous movement and expression, emotion, multimedia, and so forth. These authors even propose that such an approach is scripturally based.<sup>3</sup> A still more innovative example is the programmed creativity of folk-rock worship experiences for youth—experiences that rarely fail to puzzle some adults.

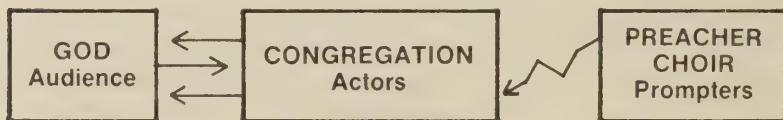
QUESTIONS: *What do you feel is lacking in the suggested definition? How does your church view the nature of worship? (A conversation with two or three members could prove revealing.) Do your church youth appear to have a particular concept of worship? What is it? Is the concept of worship in your church reflected in practice?*

### Worship: a Model

Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), Danish philosopher-theologian, left us a penetrating suggestion about worship that merits study.<sup>4</sup> He observed that worshipers went to church to sit and participate in the experience as they would the theater. They were the spectators, there to watch the preacher and choir, who were the main performers. God filled the role (if present at all) of a remote prompter. The entire transaction seemed one-way, from actors to spectators; only the actors were presumed to have any direct reference to God. The relationship might be pictured as follows:



Kierkegaard declared that true worship was quite different from going to a concert or play. Worshipers are not to be *passive*, receiving the word of the Lord revealed only and uniquely through a spokesman. Instead, worshipers are the prime actors whose diverse actions are a “performance” that affirms their devotion and praise to God. God is not a hidden prompter but rather the *audience*. Clergy and choir are *prompters* who remind, suggest, and assist the worshipers. This model might be diagrammed thus:



One significance of such a model is that it changes the focus of *responsibility* for worship. No longer is the preacher or leader solely responsible for the experience. The worshiper becomes responsible for his own worship. No longer is he free to blame or credit others; he must face his own actions and develop his own acts of confession, adoration, praise, offering, and service. Worshipers must become involved or their actions cannot be “in spirit and in truth.”

QUESTIONS: *What changes would you make in worship experiences in your church in order to implement Kierkegaard's model? Would it mean changes in what your church is not doing for/with youth? What worship aids are available but not now being used with your youth group?*

### Involving Youth in Worship

A bumper sticker I spotted some time ago read: “God is not dead. He just doesn’t want to get involved.” Effective worship will demand that youth get involved if they are to find ways to express

joy/  
  thanksgiving/  
    sorrow/  
      disappointment/  
        prejudice/  
          hate/  
          anger/  
            celebration/  
            compassion/  
            hope/  
            confession/  
            other concerns.

Some youth are comfortable with structured worship services planned by the church staff. Having grown up with a traditional pattern, they accept it without reservation. The fellowship of peers, mingling with the opposite sex, familiar seating area, music perceived as being religious, and attractive platform personalities serve their particular pattern of needs. Small changes in the structure or content of worship might be perceived as novelty. A good source of meaningful planning suggestions for enriching their worship is John T. Wayland's *Planning Congregational Worship Services*.<sup>5</sup>

However, after studying 7,050 church youth Merton Strommen concluded: "An enigma for youth is why gatherings to celebrate their faith, such as Sunday morning worship, are often dull. Many find inspiration totally lacking in this function of their church family." <sup>6</sup>

For what are these who feel an absence of excitement and celebration in worship searching? Are there ways the church may assist them to experience the holy and transcendent in "here-and-now" categories that are valid?

*Creative, Contemporary:* The collection of structured responses to these questions have been loosely called creative or contemporary worship. Creative and contemporary, unfortunately, have come to mean everything from a changed order of service to the bizarre. In an effort to be more precise, James L. Christensen has suggested these characteristics of creative or contemporary worship.

1. It attempts to meet people where they are in scientific understanding, with a vocabulary that expresses faith in terms relevant to the twentieth-century mind . . . . Contemporary worship strives to use contemporary thought forms and urban language.
2. It attempts to recapture the spirit of celebration, expressing joy in what the Holy Spirit has done and is doing in the world. Themes of worship focus on the new life and victory in Christ's love and hope.
3. It is oriented to the needs of persons rather than the needs of the institution. Some traditional worship services have seemed tantamount to a rally, encouraging support and loyalty to the organization . . . . It focuses upon where God intersects humanity in everyday happenings.
4. It strives to involve the worshiper, both bodily and mentally.
5. It is characterized by focus upon life and the social applications of faith, in contrast to the other-worldly emphasis.<sup>7</sup>

QUESTIONS: *What means have you used to learn about youth needs in worship? In what ways are the developmental needs of youth important to their worship? Do you agree with Christensen's ideas on contemporary worship? How do they apply to youth in worship?*

### Preliminary Considerations

"But do our kids really want that kind of experience?" A basic principle is to avoid assuming you know what youth want and will respond to in worship. Ask them! This can be done in at least two ways.

First, youth may serve as part of a churchwide study group on worship. David Randolph holds that "In virtually every case when significant progress is made to more meaningful worship there is a small group in the church that made an intensive study of the meaning of worship."<sup>8</sup> He urges that such study include both those who do and do not attend worship services and that it become part of a cycle of study, data-gathering, creation of resources, designing of services, worship, evaluation, study, and so forth. Wilfred M. Bailey has printed some results of this process for a marriage ceremony, a funeral, and a baptismal service in one church.<sup>9</sup>

A second technique is to utilize a worship inventory that provides data on youth attitudes, preferences, and desires. Such data could help in planning and evaluating youth worship experiences as well as in assisting the church staff in planning worship for the entire congregation. A suggested inventory follows.



YOUTH WORSHIP INVENTORY

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Sex \_\_\_\_\_ Church member? \_\_\_\_\_ How long? \_\_\_\_\_

1. The high point of the worship service for me is:
- |                         |                              |
|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| _____ morning prayer    | _____ special music          |
| _____ Scripture reading | _____ sermon                 |
| _____ invitation        | _____ congregational singing |
|                         | _____ other.                 |
2. Which of the following type of worship service would you prefer:
- |  |                                      |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| _____ very formal                          | _____ restrained, but not too formal |
| _____ more spontaneous and less structured | _____ very informal, unstructured    |
3. I prefer a sermon that:
- |  |
|--|
| _____ is highly evangelistic                             |
| _____ relates Scripture to everyday problems             |
| _____ is based on personal illustrations from the pastor |
| _____ explains a Scripture passage                       |
| _____ is based on real youth experiences.                |
4. How long do you believe a sermon should be? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Which type of music do you prefer in a worship service? (Underline.)  
old familiar hymns; new catchy tunes; folk music; choir anthems; solo.
6. Do you feel that dramatic presentations help you to worship?  
yes \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_ sometimes \_\_\_\_\_
7. Do announcements detract from worship? \_\_\_\_\_
8. If you could, what one thing would you change in the worship service of your church? \_\_\_\_\_
9. What do you feel should be the strongest note or theme in a worship service? (Underline.)  
laughter; thanksgiving; joy; assurance; hope; seriousness; commitment.
10. Would you prefer to have regular Youth Worship Services separate from adults?  
yes \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_ occasionally \_\_\_\_\_
11. When new elements are introduced in a worship service (guitars instead of organ, dialogue instead of sermon, drama, or any change from the regular service), what is your reaction?
12. Do you like sermons that are obviously directed toward youth (sex, dating, vocation, and so forth)? \_\_\_\_\_ What subjects would you like to hear discussed? \_\_\_\_\_

13. Would you like for the pastor to preach occasionally on topics suggested by youth in your church? \_\_\_\_\_

14. Do adults in your church encourage youth to participate in the leadership of worship services? \_\_\_\_\_

15. What is your favorite song for use in worship? \_\_\_\_\_

16. Consider the meaning of the words of the following songs, and number them in order of their significance for you in worship.

- |                          |                                       |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| _____ In the Garden      | _____ One in the Spirit               |
| _____ Here Is My Life    | _____ Holy, Holy, Holy                |
| _____ How Great Thou Art | _____ A Mighty Fortress               |
| _____ Room at the Cross  | _____ Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee |

17. Listed below are a few of the many types of music used in worship today. Circle the types most significant to you and explain why.

- Major works, such as Handel's *Messiah*
- Formal anthems, such as settings of scriptural texts
- Folk musicals, such as *Good News*
- Anthems that are hymn arrangements
- Gospel songs, such as "Love Lifted Me"
- Choruses, such as "Sweet, Sweet Spirit"
- Spirituals, such as "He's Got the Whole World in His Hand"

18. What do you usually do during the morning worship service? \_\_\_\_\_

19. The greatest problem I am facing just now is \_\_\_\_\_.

20. What do you do in order to help you worship in private (Bible reading, prayer, meditation, and so forth)? \_\_\_\_\_

21. When I listen to the preaching, I am:

- interested most of the time
- bored most of the time because
  - I usually don't listen
  - the sermon is not relevant to me most of the time
  - I'd rather be somewhere else
  - I honestly don't understand what's being said most of the time.

Other:

22. The offering is part of the worship service because:

- the church needs the money to pay bills
- it is my obligation to give
- the Bible says we should give
- it gives me opportunity to give something of myself to God.

23. When other people lead in prayer, I:

- ☐ listen to the words and participate silently in the prayer to make it mine also
- ☐ feel close to God and enjoy the experience
- ☐ think of other things
- ☐ think about the prayer but don't know what to do or what to concentrate on.

Other:

24. When I participate in the Lord's Supper, I:

- ☐ understand its meaning
- ☐ consider it routine; I don't really understand it
- ☐ enjoy the reverent atmosphere
- ☐ feel the presence of Christ in a special way.

Other:

25. When the Bible is read in a worship service, I:

- ☐ don't pay much attention
- ☐ listen for the meaning of the passage
- ☐ read along silently in personal or pew Bible
- ☐ consider it a meaningful part of the worship for me.

Other comments:

I read the Bible for private worship: ☐ never  
☐ sometimes  
☐ on a regular basis.

26. Meaningful characteristics of worship for me are:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> service to others    | <input type="checkbox"/> talking about religion    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> feeling forgiven     | <input type="checkbox"/> with friends              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> praising God         | <input type="checkbox"/> speaking to God           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> being quiet          | <input type="checkbox"/> listening to God          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> praying              | <input type="checkbox"/> singing                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> going forward during | <input type="checkbox"/> giving money              |
| the invitation                                | <input type="checkbox"/> listening to the preacher |
| <input type="checkbox"/> being with friends   | <input type="checkbox"/> other.                    |

27. I really feel God's presence most when (consider *any* time—public or private):

Once you have discovered youth attitudes, another principle is to avoid using worship experiences to *justify* an activity you have already decided to promote. It is patently unacceptable to use worship as a means to a predetermined end. The emotions of youth have sometimes been prostituted in this way by professional and

amateur religious hucksters. Simply put, don't use worship to manipulate persons for your purposes.

A third principle is that the success or failure of worship cannot be determined by whether or not a predetermined activity results. Success is not to be measured in terms of the activity the *leader* desires. For example, he may wish a tithing commitment when the worshiper needs to give his commitment "to do justly, and to love mercy" (Mic. 6:8) or to repent of prejudice.

### Planning for Youth Worship Experiences

A basic assumption in all youth education is that there is need for adult guidance in the process. Thus, caring adults are needed to assist youth in planning for their worship experiences. This helping process involves several considerations.

1. Objective-theme-reason for the experience. Determination should be made of the focus of the experience, including whether it is to be built around a sermon or whether a sermon is to grow out of the theme. How is this theme or objective to be expressed and developed?

2. Consider carefully the composition of the youth audience/group. Significant factors include age, sophistication, prejudices, recent events in the immediate situation, theological climate of the community and church, and pastoral leadership.

3. Consider the length and character of the responsible adult's relationship to the group. Closeness may permit dealing with their personal concerns in worship but make their personal, open response more difficult. Personal distance, if accompanied by respect, may even make response easier. (This is a factor in Billy Graham crusades, where personal distance seems to facilitate response.) Still another factor is age, since there is a tendency to choose vehicles for worship that suit the adult's age rather than teenagers.

4. Consider available leadership resources: reading, drama, music, media, speaking, art. It is better to do *less* through use of youth than always to bring outsiders to do a great deal *for* youth. Youth become involved and grow through participation.

5. Consider physical factors that may affect worship. These include group size; setting and atmosphere; seating arrangements;

musical instruments available; physical comfort; lighting; materials such as hymnals and bulletins. John Burke reports that some youth choir members even ask, "Why do we have to wear robes which cover up our individuality when the church teaches the worth of the individual, and when society does everything to remove the individuality and to establish a mass culture?"<sup>10</sup>

6. Consider specific (and perhaps even unusual) ways to involve group members in participation: litany, liturgy, dialogues, music, responsive readings, prayers, directed meditation, or sharing through written or artistic symbols.

7. Consider the impact of symbolism and ritual with this particular youth group. What is likely to be the impact upon them—not the adult? The leader should not force his symbols on youth. He may discover they have a negative effect. For example, some youth groups would respond negatively to the presence of a cross and candles on a covered table as the visual focus for worship.

8. Consider specific methods or activities through which youth may express in action their essentially emotional responses. "What can I *do* in response to this experience?" is a question deserving of an answer.

*Selected Resources:* In addition to sources cited in the chapter, see the bibliography at the end of this chapter for ideas that can enrich worship experiences for youth.

### Learning as the Mode

Teaching-learning was deeply imbedded in the tradition of Israel. The *shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4–9, was a classic description of family responsibility for ensuring learning. The rabbi was an educator as well as an interpreter of Scripture. So serious was the rabbis' view of learning that they posited a question: "What does God do in the fourth quarter of the day?" Reply: "He sits and instructs the school children."<sup>11</sup> One rabbi said: "Perish the sanctuary [place of worship], but let the children go to school."<sup>12</sup> Let the church burn down, but save the place of learning, the synagogue school. Learning was even more important than worship!

Jesus stressed the importance of learning. Indeed, his whole life and ministry suggest that rabbi or teacher was his chief role for most



of his followers.

What is the implication of this? It is simply that of all the processes for transmitting a religious heritage (indoctrination, force, sacraments, slavery), the Christian faith rests primarily upon the process of teaching and learning. Learning is the mode for both communication and survival among men of God's revelation in Jesus Christ.

### Learning: a Definition

Psychologists, researchers, and laymen all wish they knew more about the nature of the learning process. Education and selfhood, as Roger Shinn observes, are still a mystery. Perhaps the most that can be said about learning is to identify several processes through which it occurs, suggest some basic theories, and propose a definition.

*Processes:* The chief processes through which learning occurs are *rote conditioning* (which includes even subconscious responses), resulting from experiences of pleasure/pain; *identification* with peers and family; *trial-and-success* (problem-solving, exploration, discovery, testing); and *insight* (discovering clues that enable one to see new connections and a new synthesis and to find a solution). Jesse Ziegler has also suggested *sublimation*—when it serves to prevent primitive sexual drives from interfering with the learning process.<sup>13</sup>

*Theories:* Learning theories are both numerous and complex. It is not within the purposes of this chapter to critique them. However, the bibliography at the end of this chapter should provide some helpful references for further study.

Additional reading might include the writings of Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, Jerome Bruner, and Sidney Simon.

*Definition:* Learning is technically an intervening variable used as an explanatory concept to account for the relatively permanent changes in behavior that occur as a function of experience. It is the inference of these variables that we call "learning."

A more workable definition is that learning represents changes in perceiving and behaving as a result of experience. It is the difference, the change, that constitutes learning. It involves changes in cognition (knowledge, knowing), motivation (learning to like or dislike), group identification (belonging to or alienation from a cul-

ture), and voluntary control of the bodily muscles (speech, motion, self-control).

Teaching, then, becomes arranging the conditions necessary to learning and learning how to learn. The learner becomes responsible for his own learning, and his decision in each experience conditions his future learning potential. Jesus clearly described this aspect of personal responsibility in Luke 8:18, about which Frank Staggs comments:

Jesus insisted that the hearer is responsible for how he hears. Verse 10 does not mean that God determines who may understand and who may not. The difference is in the condition of the hearers. It has to do with attitude. The conclusion to the parable is a warning that how one hears determines whether his capacity for hearing increases or decreases. . . . The consequence of refusing to hear is the loss of ability to hear.<sup>14</sup>

To expect that intentional learning will occur in a youth group or anywhere else solely because a teacher or leader is present (even if he is prepared) is a church tradition that needs demythologizing! The learner's attitude and preparation are always 51 percent of any successful teaching-learning transaction. That is the main purpose of printed curriculum materials: They are aids to the *intentional* learnings of youth.

Specific study and learning programs for church youth are commonly designed for intentional, cognitive learning experiences. They usually involve classrooms, printed curricula, learning aids, planning, and infrequent evaluation. These tend to be viewed as the sole or chief provisions for teaching and learning. It should be recognized, however, that learning is of three types (cognitive, psychomotor, and affective) and occurs in many ways, in a variety of contexts. For example, significant learning results from activities such as sports, camping, mission tours, music, drama, crafts, hobbies, travel, creative writing, photography, and art. One ministry of the church is to help youth discover and develop skills that not only bring satisfaction but that also may provide some income and even an occupational career. This type of learning may not always yield to the use of classroom agenda but will result primarily from participatory experiences. (Denominational publishing houses have materials which provide guidance in these areas.)

Leaders should encourage youth to develop creativity by providing incentive and technique. Ross Snyder's ideas for "processing lived moments into culture," "phenomenologizing," and "theologizing about existence" through the use of art, documentary imaging, and haiku are deserving of study and experimentation for this purpose.<sup>15</sup>

Youth ministry projects may also involve youth in learning about other groups, finance and fund-raising, tutoring, ministering to senior adults, service projects, learning about political power, dealing with bureaucracies, and so forth.<sup>16</sup>

### **Sunday School as a Learning Context**

The popular assumption regarding youth Sunday School seems to be: "There is some bad news and some good news. The bad news is that most youth Sunday School classes experience only exposition and lecture and are therefore dull and uninteresting. The good news is that some other youth classes are creative, exciting, and always interesting discovery experiences which, if duplicated by others, would cause youth to crowd into classrooms." Neither of these statements is totally true.

The assumption that expository teaching is always dull and uninteresting is refuted by the recollections of most students. There *are* persons whose knowledge, speech, and communication skills make such a learning experience very exciting. Also, certain special knowledge about Bible interpretation as well as mature experience may most immediately be available through a teacher. Nevertheless, this approach does tend to overlook the learner's need to be self-active and the fact that few Sunday School teachers are so gifted as to pull that off. This probably explains why helpful how-to books are rare, if not nonexistent.

Harvard psychologist Jerome S. Bruner has given new significance to the concept of learning as essentially a process of discovery.<sup>17</sup> Confronted with a problem or need, the learner discovers a solution through purposeful seeking. This concept has become popularized as "creative," "inductive," and "interest-centered" teaching and learning.

The discovery or creative approach to teaching is usually basic to

viewing youth Sunday School experiences as a total period, organized around a central truth or theme. Thus, whether working as a large group or in small groups, youth Sunday School needs no time segmented as class or teaching time. The total experience is one of active learning through discovery and creativity. All methods and resources for learning are encouraged and employed: art, music, dramatic improvisation, gaming, role-playing, case study, and group techniques.

### Involvement of Youth

Youth are most readily involved in learning that meets their needs. Strommen reported that church youth's most intense feelings of need are loneliness (or self-hatred), parental alienation, anger over social injustice, prejudice, and a need for "identifying with a personal God and a believing community."<sup>18</sup> One survey of selected church youth indicated that their major concerns were determining God's will for their lives, relationships with parents, school problems, vocational decisions, and loneliness. These findings suggest possible topics for study, but final choices should be based upon needs of a specific youth group.

"*Don't lets:*" In a leader's efforts to gain youth involvement in learning, the factor over which he has greatest control is *himself*. Therefore, here is a list of "don't lets" for youth leaders.

1. Don't let the thoughts and suggestions in printed curriculum materials become a substitute for your own thinking and creativity. Curriculum materials are based upon developmental needs, not immediate needs. Immediate needs must be met by the individual leader in a specific youth group.

2. Don't let initial lack of deep interest by youth in Bible study discourage you. Most leaders confront the same problem. Plan learning procedures that begin with an awareness of the level of youth interest and attempt to create a need for learning.

3. Don't let a lack of familiarity with new methods and processes prevent you from experimenting with them. Try them!

4. Don't let the classroom become the sole location or context for the teaching-learning transaction.

5. Don't let things like appearance, equipment, and arrangement



of chairs within a room or other location prevent the “Sonshine” from coming through. Change to facilitate learning goals.

6. Don’t let the frothiness of group process, games, and sharing shroud the need for exploring substantive issues and the usually hard discipline of Bible study.

7. Don’t let your learning goals and personal interests interfere with the development and adoption by youth learners of their own goals.

*Modeling:* The leader who seeks youth involvement must first be involved in study and learning. Youth must see their leaders as persons for whom the Bible is functionally, as well as devotionally, the most important book in life. Youth leaders must know and even memorize portions of Scripture as a regular part of their growth and involvement. Appropriate use should be made of Scripture in conversation, not for show but as a symbol of its place in life. Pastoral leaders can help youth become involved in learning by *using* the Bible in preaching and worship.

*Planning:* There are no substitutes for planning for youth involvement in learning. Not even Bible knowledge and charisma will suffice. Leaders must plan study units so as to deal carefully with a flow of requirements: unit goals, specific session aims, printed resources, human resources, learning aids, and evaluation. Study leaders need two to three hours of planning for each study-learning unit and additional planning for specific sessions. All leaders must themselves become involved in learning through such planning.

Plans must be implemented to create an effective learning environment. Rather than a bare room and hard chairs, utilize meaningful posters; place the study theme on butcher paper on the wall; provide chalkboards, maps, resource materials, tables for writing, and Bible commentaries to achieve an atmosphere of *intention* for learning. A commonly accepted truth is that persons learn best when all their senses are employed in the task. Plan to reinforce learning by using all of the learner’s receptors: sight, sound, feeling, and so forth.

*Resources:* Each major denomination has its own curriculum materials, special helps, and a wide variety of interesting and valuable support materials for youth learning experiences. Independent re-



ligious publishers, not willing to be left out, have added their own brands of such materials. (See resources at end of chapter.)

As with any learning materials, the judgment, discretion, and abilities of adult leaders must be exercised in the use of these resources.

### **A CREATIVE BIBLE STUDY**

Youth Need: Strommen and others report that youth feel lonely, alienated, and even friendless.

Title: "The Care and Feeding of Friends" or "You Got a Friend"

Bible Material: Philemon

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Provide necessary materials such as felt, burlap, glue, felt-tipped pens, and butcher paper, asking that groups of youth compose and construct banners on the theme of friendship or friends. A suggestion that the banners might be kept for later display may increase the seriousness of group efforts. They could be included as part of a larger plan for competition.

While the groups work, play background recordings (not too loud) of pop songs dealing with friendship. Leaders will want to examine the texts of such songs before using them, since some pop songs are not acceptable for use as background music.

#### **GROUP REPORTS**

1. Ask each group to report by commenting on what they were trying to say through their banner(s).

2. While seated, the groups may be given copies of the words to the songs used as background music. (Remember that copyright laws must be observed.) Give only one song to each group. Ask the group to study and discuss the words, considering what these lyrics say about friendship. Then ask groups to share their observations with the entire group.

#### **BIBLE STUDY**

Leader: These lyrics are among those representing man's ways of expressing his desire and need for friendship. I wonder how they compare with examples of friends in the Bible.

One particular book in the Bible is about friendship. It is actually a kind of short story. But it reveals some things about friendship that are very

important. (Youth may be provided with a duplicated copy of Philemon, or plans may be made for each to have a Bible.)

The book is called Philemon and has three principal characters: Paul, Philemon, and Onesimus. (Ask someone to give the essential facts of the story.)

**Philemon:** Resident of Colossae, owns slave Onesimus. By Roman law he has absolute authority over the person and life of his slave. Onesimus has run away and is going to Rome. Philemon had become a Christian through Paul's earlier preaching in Asia Minor (v. 19), and his home is now a meeting place for a Christian congregation (v. 2).

**Paul:** Is under house arrest in Rome (about A.D. 61-63), has won Onesimus to faith in Christ. He now persuades Onesimus to return to Philemon. Writes letter to be carried by Onesimus to Philemon, for purpose of achieving reconciliation. This is the book of Philemon.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do verses 4–7 say about friendship?
2. What is the exact appeal and request made by Paul in verses 8–14? Do you think Paul's request is justified? Why? (Note play on words in v. 11.) Is Paul using Philemon?
3. Was Paul a good friend to Onesimus? To Philemon? Why do you think so?
4. What is an ideal friend like? What would an ideal friend do? (Discuss the ideas of the song lyrics.)
5. Judged against such an ideal, how would you evaluate the friendship in our youth group—on a scale of one (perfect) to ten (terrible)?
6. What, if anything, could improve friendship within our youth group?

### INTROSPECTION

With bowed heads, ask youth to consider their own friendliness, confess failures, resolve to befriend one new person in group, or to make any other commitments they wish to as the pianist plays softly "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" or another appropriate theme on friendship.

### Conclusion

Let it be said that the single most important influence upon youth learning is the life lived by the congregation. In the final analysis, the whole church is the teacher of the Christian faith and its practice—not just certain members elected as teachers. The

church's most powerful vehicle for teaching and involving youth in learning is congregational life, which is consistent with proclamation. Failure here is suicide.

### Notes

1. W. D. Maxwell, *An Outline of Christian Worship* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 1ff.
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3. Marilee Zdenek and Marge Champion, *Catch the New Wind* (Waco: Word Books, 1972), pp. 15-37.
4. Soren Kierkegaard, *Purity of Heart Is To Will One Thing* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1948), pp. 180-181.
5. John T. Wayland, *Planning Congregational Worship Services* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1971).
6. Merton P. Strommen, *Five Cries of Youth* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1974), p. 124.
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8. David James Randolph, *God's Party: A Guide to New Forms of Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975), p. 115.
9. Wilfred M. Bailey, *Awakened Worship: Involving Laymen in Creative Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), pp. 133-146.
10. John Burke, "It's Time For a Resurrection," *The Choral Journal* (December 1973), p. 8.
11. Lewis J. Sherrill, *The Rise of Christian Education* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1950), p. 50.
12. William Barclay, *Train Up a Child* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1959), p. 1.
13. Jesse H. Ziegler, *Psychology and the Teaching Church* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), pp. 40-43.
14. Ross Snyder, *Young People and Their Culture* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969).
15. Frank Stagg, *Studies in Luke's Gospel* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1967), p. 65.
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17. Jerome S. Bruner, *The Process of Education* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1960) and *Toward a Theory of Instruction* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1966).
18. Strommen, *loc. cit.*, p. 92.

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# Involving Youth in Mission and Witnessing

Dan Boling

The Christian experience was never meant to be kept secret. Sharing that experience vitalizes the Christian life. Youth need to learn to witness in order that they can grow and mature in their faith.

A close connection exists between witnessing and mission. Witnessing is part of the mission of the church, and the church should be on mission to witness. This chapter is designed to help you involve youth in mission and witnessing.

## What Is Mission and Witnessing?

Youth can become confused with terms such as *mission* and *witnessing*. We need to define these terms.

*Mission* is a word that we are used to hearing in the plural. We think in terms of home missions and foreign missions. Youth come to think of missions only as something that you give to in a financial way. Especially is this true where youth are encouraged to give to missions offerings. Youth can also come to think of missions only as something a person does as a life's vocation. Most youth consider becoming a foreign missionary at one time in their life if they are active in the church.

Mission, however, is basic to the Christian faith. It is the divine plan to get the good news of God's salvation to the world. The word comes from the Latin word *mittere*, "to send." The noun form is *missio*. While Latin is not the language of the New Testament, the Latin derivation corresponds to the Anglo-Saxon word meaning "sending." The Hebrew *shalach*, the Greek *apostello*, and the English *send* all translate the same passages.<sup>1</sup> Such usage would indicate that the concept of mission is basically thought of as sending.

Mission should be thought of as an event and an idea. Jesus



described himself on mission and the sending of his followers as being on mission in John 20:21: "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you" (KJV). This is mission as event. Jesus had earlier described this event as an idea. He had prayed, "As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them in the world" (John 17:18). God's purpose in sending Jesus was for the purpose of accomplishing salvation (Rom. 8:1-3). God's purpose in sending his followers on mission is that they might give witness to the saving work of Christ in their lives. Mission and witnessing, therefore, are closely connected.

*Witness* is a word that basically means giving testimony to God's nature and to his work in the world. Youth think of witnessing basically as proclamation. We are told in the Great Commission to be witnesses (Acts 1:8). Proclamation is witnessing, but the concept of witnessing is much more inclusive. It is possible to witness through one's deeds. Jesus referred to his work as a witness (John 15:27; 10:25). Ministry, therefore, is a witness to the work of God, as is proclamation. As youth do the work of ministry and service, they are witnesses; but there is a danger in thinking that just living a good life is all there is to being a witness.

Proclamation is expressed in two New Testament words. The first is *kerusso*, "to herald." Another is *euaggelizo*, "to preach the gospel." The first means to tell the bare facts of the gospel, and the latter is the work we translate as evangelism. Youth need to realize that they are to proclaim the message of salvation, but the gospel is never proclaimed in a vacuum. The gospel is always proclaimed in a meaningful context of ministry.

Jesus expressed this connection between mission and proclamation as he quoted the prophecy of Isaiah 61 in Luke 4:17-21. In this passage proclamation is mentioned three times, but always in the context of ministry. Jesus was on mission to proclaim, to heal, to set people free, to help people see, and to announce his coming. The ministry of proclamation is a mission, and to be a follower of Jesus is to share in his mission.

Mission and witness have been described so far in a theological context, and such an understanding is necessary for the person who seeks to involve youth in these important ministries of the Christian

life. A problem can arise, however, in the ambiguity of the terms as they are used in a theological discussion, in contrast to the practical way they are used in the life of the church. Some would, by way of definition, include everything that the church does under the heading of mission. Others would include all that the church does under the term *evangelism* or *witnessing*. To do so opens a youth program to the danger of broadening these terms so much that they become meaningless. Difficulty can arise in getting youth involved in mission and witness if the terms are too broad. Thus the terms need to be defined in a more narrow way.

Witnessing for the remainder of this chapter will be used to describe sharing in a group or sharing in a one-to-one encounter of one's faith. Witnessing always extends to persons beyond a fellowship of believers and is a vital part of a mission trip. The purpose of witnessing is to influence persons to respond to Jesus Christ and to join a fellowship of believers, the church. While the life of the witness is directly connected to the effectiveness of the witness, witnessing is more than living the Christian life. Witnessing is the verbal proclamation of how Christ has made life meaningful in one's own life and the telling of what purpose Christ had in coming into the world.

The term *mission* will be used from this point to describe an event that is an organized group activity directed beyond the fellowship of the church. It may be but does not necessarily need to be directed toward bringing persons into the church. It is mission for the sake of the needs of persons. It includes proclamation by telling, but it also includes proclamation by doing. The latter is referred to by some as mission action.

Youth involved in experiences of witnessing and mission find the real meaning of what it means to be in Christ. Workers with youth need to consider the many ways that youth can be involved in this important part of the Christian life.

### **Why Involve Youth in Witnessing and Mission?**

Witnessing and mission have been discussed as inherent in the very nature of being a follower of Jesus. Youth need to be involved in witnessing and mission for what it does for Christ and what it does

for them. Other reasons are discussed below.

1. Witnessing and mission help youth fulfill biblical directives. Youth cannot attend church or youth group activities without being confronted with the command of Jesus recorded in Acts 1:8, "Ye shall be witnesses." Lawrence Richards describes a survey made among three thousand youth in evangelical churches. Ninety-five percent of the respondents indicated they ought to witness.<sup>2</sup> The four reasons most often given for failing to witness were fear, lack of know-how, lack of relationship with a lost person, and a feeling of aloneness in the witnessing task. The latter refers to youth who felt they would be the only persons in their peer group who would witness.

Many feel guilty because they do not witness. Probably the majority of Christians in our churches have not had a one-to-one verbal encounter with a nonbeliever once in their lives. Helping youth to learn to witness helps them get rid of a great deal of guilt.

2. Faith is kept vibrant when it is shared. Jesus was concerned that his followers experience discipleship as giving meaning and fullness to life. He instructed his disciples to be busy bearing fruit, for in so doing they would find joy (John 15:11). Joy found in sharing the good news helps make a stagnant Christian experience become vibrant.

Youth years are a time of questioning. Most youth will have some doubts as to their own Christian experience. Doubts left alone tend to be like festering sores. Although they scab over, beneath the surface the infection has a possibility of spreading to other areas of the body. Doubt in the Christian life, when left alone, can cause faith to become stagnant. As youth get involved in witness, they get away from abstractions. Abstractions and doubts are not as significant when one is facing a real human being with a real need.

3. Youth grow in Christian maturity as they share the Christian life. Youth will feel a compulsion to give witness to their Christian experience because the Bible says they should witness. It is only in sharing, however, that they find out that a compulsion to share is not a good enough reason to witness. Sharing must result from a loving concern for those with whom you share.

Rosalind Rinker describes her first attempts to witness as a youth.

She did not want to be branded as "not a good Christian." Beginning with a mechanical approach (learning all the answers to excuses people would give), she quickly saw there was much more to witnessing. She came to realize that she needed God to teach her to love people as he loved people.<sup>3</sup> In her witnessing attempts, her own experience with God grew, as did her effectiveness.

Youth in your church need to grow in their Christian experience. As they relate their testimony to others, they begin to discover weaknesses and strengths of their Christian life. Weaknesses, once identified, can be strengthened by study in the biblical faith and by affirmation from members of the body of Christ. Strengths that you already have tend to be affirmed in other Christian experiences.

4. Youth are effective in reaching out. Youth are effective in witnessing, and their mission efforts make a real impact upon the people and communities to whom they minister.

Merton P. Strommen of the Youth Research Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota, describes a research project of training youth to reach youth. The project was entitled "Youth Reaching Youth," and its ultimate purpose was to alter the behavior and life-style of youth by means of the friendship and concern of other youth.

While the above project was complex and multifaceted, the results showed that college-age youth surpass professional trainers in reaching out to high school youth and that high school youth can effectively train others their age.<sup>4</sup> Strommen's project does show that youth can be taught to reach out to alienated youth and that when they do, they have a reasonable degree of effectiveness.

5. Non-Christian youth need to receive a witness. In considering why youth need to be involved in witnessing and mission, we must never forget the reason Christ came into the world. Jesus said, "For the Son of man is come to seek and save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). The Old Testament injunction "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth" (Eccl. 12:1) well points up how youth are responsive to religious influence during this period of their lives. Many studies show that the youth years are the most productive years for Christian conversion.<sup>5</sup>

Christian youth, properly trained, have the best opportunity to reach non-Christian youth for Christ. They go to school together;



they are aware of the needs of each other; and they know how to communicate with each other. Who better can give witness to non-Christian youth than Christian youth?

6. Our complex society calls for mission action. Not only do youth need to know about Christ, but there are many others in our society who need to receive the benefits of the good news. Jesus came “to seek and to save the lost,” but he also came to heal persons of their physical and emotional pain. He was concerned also for those who were hungry and in need of feeding.

Youth need to be involved in mission action because people have many needs in our complex society. Youth, with all of their enthusiasm, can bring warmth to those who are cold, love to those who are lonely, and hope to those who are hopeless.

7. Mission outreach puts faith in action. One young girl said after a mission trip, “I never realized that Christianity was something you do.” Getting involved in her youth group’s mission trip helped her see that the truths learned in church were to be used in life. Involving youth in witnessing and mission will allow them to grow as they put their faith into action.

### **Involving Youth in Witnessing**

Youth will find a real sense of fulfillment as they are involved in witnessing. A barrier to their involvement, however, is that while most Christians are impressed by witnessing testimonies, they cannot identify themselves as being so bold. Below are some suggestions to help involve youth in witnessing.

1. Involve youth as a group in witnessing. Studies show that younger youth, those who are twelve to fourteen, do not like to stand apart from their peer group. Even older youth do not feel sure enough of their identity to do certain things apart from a group. It is best, therefore, to involve youth in witnessing as a group project.

A group project in witnessing does not mean that a whole group approaches one person in a witnessing encounter. Probably the most effective witnessing is accomplished by two or three people approaching one person. Youth do not want to feel as if they are the only one among their peers who is training to witness. Enlist a group of youth to train together.



2. Challenge youth to witness by using biblical motivation. Motivation is both intrinsic and extrinsic. Youth who have committed themselves to Christ want to please their Lord. Desire to please is intrinsic motivation. Passages from the Bible, extrinsic motivation, stimulate youth to witness about Jesus and his message.

In using biblical motivation, however, the youth worker should avoid some past abuses. Seek to find passages that motivate out of a sense of love rather than out of guilt or fear. In the past, some youth in the church have feared the loss of their own salvation from a failure to witness. These fears come from misinterpretation of such passages as John 15. Jesus described himself as the vine and his followers as the branches. The term *bear fruit* is sometimes used to tell Christians that they need to win people to Christ. Actually, the Holy Spirit does the winning. Jesus' instruction in this passage was that Christians should produce love for people. We do that as we abide in him. When unbelievers come in contact with a loving fellowship of believers, the Holy Spirit can use that environment to win the lost to Jesus.

Passages that emphasize the joy of witnessing should be used with youth (John 15:11; Acts 2:41–47; 5:41–42). Youth need to see that they will have power to witness (John 15:26–27; Acts 1:8) and that when they witness there will be results (Acts 2:41; 8:26–39). Important to youth is the fact that they do not witness alone (Acts 5:32).

3. Training helps youth be effective in witnessing. Once you motivate youth to witness, they must not be expected to witness without knowing how. Plan some type of group training experience to help them learn some simple witnessing techniques.

Pick a training program that includes a lab experience. Two examples of such labs are W.I.N. (Witness Involvement Now) training or a W.O.W. (Win Our World) clinic. Both provide an opportunity for an actual witnessing encounter as part of the training experience.

4. Help youth overcome fear of witnessing. Fear in witnessing is everybody's hang-up. Paul told us that the source of fear is not God. "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (2 Tim. 1:7). Fear can incapacitate youth, keeping them from what they would like to do.

Types of fear youth experience are fear in not knowing how to witness, fear of a lack of ability to witness, fear of driving their friends away from Christ and themselves, fear of ridicule, and fear of failure.

At the first training session, discuss the fear of witnessing. Let youth know they will have some fear. A trainer who is open about his own fear can lead the group to ask God for help in overcoming fear. Love for those to whom you witness helps overcome this fear.

5. Reinforce youth in their common sense. Some training programs approach witnessing in a way similar to what Rosalind Rinker first experienced. These programs teach people to be ready to answer all of the questions that could possibly be asked in a witnessing encounter. Such approaches tend to give all sorts of hints about what to do before, during, and after a witnessing attempt.

Pick an approach that trains youth to use a small booklet or tract in witnessing. Give them some training in how to use the booklet, but encourage them to use common sense in knowing what to do.

6. Youth need to experience modeling in witnessing. Do not expect youth to do witnessing on their own. Help them begin the sharing life by showing them how to witness. Modeling is a dynamic teaching method and is more difficult than merely telling youth how to witness. Provide youth with people who model witnessing. An effective model knows when to turn to his youth partner and say, "Why don't you share what Christ means to you?"

7. Allow youth to share the results of their witnessing. Keep in mind that all witnessing does not result in someone's coming to know Jesus in personal faith. If a youth has witnessed to his own faith, he has been successful and needs to feel so. Youth need to share with others that they have followed the commissioning of Jesus in being a witness.

Sharing the witnessing experience can take place as the conclusion to a lab night, or it can be a special time set aside during a mission trip. At the discretion of the youth worker, youth can be invited to participate in regular worship services of the church by giving testimonies about witnessing experiences. Youth are sometimes embarrassed before a large group, however; and they may not want to stand apart from the youth group.

### Involving Youth in Mission

Youth will respond to opportunities to be involved in mission, whether they be in their local community or on a trip away from home. Here are some principles to remember when involving youth in mission.

1. Let youth help plan their mission. Youth, developmentally, are ready to assume leadership roles. They like to express their ideas and to have their ideas affirmed. Lead youth to see the need for mission, but challenge them to be actively involved in planning mission outreach.

A word of caution: Too many adult planners will stifle youth's ideas. Freedom to express these ideas helps youth to mature and increases their involvement in the project. Youth can help pick the site for the mission, set objectives to be reached, plan for financing the mission, and enlist other youth to go.

2. Youth can help finance their mission. Various kinds of mission outreach programs call for differing financing. Projects to raise money for needs on the mission can involve youth in the mission project even before it begins. A mission trip should pay its own way as far as possible and not be a burden to those you are going to help.

A youth group should first check with its church as to whether there are any bylaws against raising funds for a mission project. If there are no objections, youth can raise funds by car washes, bottle drives, rent-a-youth days, garage sales, and other fund-raising projects.

3. Prepare youth for what to expect while on mission. If the mission takes youth to a different section of their city or to another community, help them to know about cultural differences. Lead them to adopt rules of dress and action that will not violate any cultural morés encountered or cause any danger to youth group members.

Prepare the youth to perform specific tasks. If they are expected to teach in backyard Bible schools, they will need training in the use of curriculum materials. If group members will be expected to do housekeeping chores, youth should know they are expected to do their part.

4. Keep youth from overextending themselves in mission action. Youth, with limited experience, tend to adopt higher goals than they can achieve. It is imperative that they feel a degree of success in what they attempt to do. Short-term projects are better for youth than long-term.

Youth are more effective with younger age groups than equals or elders. Bible clubs with younger children may be the best type of project for beginning efforts.

Realism in adopting financial goals keeps youth from trying to do more than they are able. Be careful not to dampen their enthusiasm and optimism.

5. Take advantage of talents in your youth group. Youth are more likely to be involved in mission outreach if you will plan to use their particular talents. Youth feel left out of a mission trip if the whole effort revolves around a musical performance and they themselves do not sing. Plan to take advantage of skills of art, publicity, teaching, organization, electronics, and just plain hard work.

6. Provide youth with adequate adult leadership for their mission outreach. While it would be possible to have too many adults involved, supply enough adult leadership to insure success. The principle holds true in preparation for mission and while on the mission. Adults can give youth supervision, whether it be in teaching preschoolers a Vacation Bible School lesson or in putting a roof on a house.

7. Youth need recognition for their involvement in mission. Recognition reinforces youth in their commitment to be involved in the ministry of Christ. It also serves as an enlistment device for other mission projects.

Publicity should be given to the church while youth are planning their mission action project. News of the project promotes church awareness to lend support to the effort and encourages youth in their mission. While the mission is in process, the church should be encouraged to pray for the mission and to lend support when they can. Closely following the completion of the mission effort, recognition should be given to the youth in some regular gathering of the church.

### Types of Witnessing Activities

Workers with youth can find many and varied activities in which to involve youth in witnessing. A partial list of witnessing activities follows.

*Win Our World (W.O.W.)*—a seminar designed to train youth in the verbalizing of their Christian experience. W.O.W. materials are available from the Home Mission Board, Evangelism Department, 1350 Spring Street, NW, Atlanta, Georgia 30309.

*“E” Groups*—groups of youth that meet for one night a week for twelve weeks. The “E” stands for evangelism, and those who join commit themselves to train to witness. They agree to witness at least once a week by the time of the fifth meeting. These experiences are shared in weekly meetings and evaluated.

*Touch Ministry*—a program where youth workers plan regular visits to high school and junior high school campuses. The workers develop friendships that later become witnessing opportunities. Christian youth help make vital contacts on campus.

*Youth Discipleship Training*—a program to help committed youth to develop a quiet time, to grow in Bible study, and to learn to help another youth in a one-to-one relationship.

*Joy Explosion*—can be a party at someone’s home, a beach party, a retreat, or some informal activity. Non-Christian youth are invited for fun, followed with the sharing of testimonies by Christian youth and their leaders.

*Youth Rallies*—large gatherings of youth with activities that include group competition, singing, drama, and other activities that attract youth. Youth are encouraged to bring non-Christian friends, and time is given to sharing of their faith.

*Youth-led Revivals*—week-long or weekend revival meetings. College students are used to preach, lead singing, direct fellowships, and lead seminars. High school and junior high youth do the planning, publicity, and visitation. Youth-led revivals are led by youth but are for the entire church family.

*Canvassing*—training a youth group to take a religious census. Information gained is used in follow-up by the church, and the



census form leads into a witnessing opportunity at each home.

*Musicals*—youth musicals are an effective way to launch an evangelistic ministry into shopping centers, parks, beaches, and high school assemblies. Singers can mill around with the audience after each performance and share their personal testimonies.

*Performing Groups*—singing or instrumental groups with an evangelistic thrust.

*Resort Witnessing*—planned witnessing opportunities for youth in resort areas such as beaches, ski areas, and national parks. Christian youth engage other youth in conversation, which leads to sharing the faith.

*Church Bus Evangelism*—the use of youth as bus captains and workers on church bus ministry routes. Youth develop a loving relationship with their riders, which leads to witnessing opportunities.

*Youth Outreach*—planned visitation for youth. Going in groups of two or three, church youth can reach out to non-Christian youth. Variations of this form of outreach are witnessing in homes, picking up youth as part of a human scavenger hunt, or inviting youth to an informal party, where sharing will take place.

### **Types of Mission Activities**

Youth on mission can vary from a group going down the block to a group going to a foreign country. Their purpose is to minister in the name of Christ. Here are some ideas for mission involvement.

*Backyard Bible Clubs*—the gathering of children by youth for an hour or two of activities. The curriculum is similar to Vacation Bible School, which includes a Bible story, handicraft projects, and refreshments.

*Ministry to the Aging*—raking leaves, mowing grass, delivering hot meals, aiding with grocery shopping, and running errands are ways youth can minister to the aging.

*Crisis Closet*—collection of clothing and groceries from church members to establish a closet or room in the church. Supplies from the crisis closet are used to help needy families.

*Institutional Ministries*—ministry in children's homes, hospitals, jails, and retirement homes. Youth can lead worship services, read

stories and articles, write letters, sing, and lead recreation.

*Tutoring*—done by youth in institutional settings—for example, in children's homes or in a deprived area of the community. Youth, who have had time to excel in a school subject, usually are more effective in tutoring persons younger than themselves.

*Literacy Teaching*—older youth using the Laubach Literacy method, which they can do effectively. Social agencies will help in finding people to teach.

*Day Camping*—a camping program at a local park or recreation area. Youth serve as counselors.

*Mission Vacation Bible School*—youth helping with the VBS program as a mission of their church or as part of a mission trip.

*Work Trips*—a mission venture with work as its object. Youth have painted church buildings, cleaned up yards of needy people, repainted houses of people on welfare, been involved in new church construction, and been part of disaster teams that go in and clean up debris.

*"Hot Line"*—selected youth are trained to monitor telephones as part of a crisis ministry, such as helping runaways.

### Summary of This Chapter

Youth want to be involved in the life of the church. Vital to the life of the church are mission and witnessing. Youth are effective when they are trained, inspired, and given an opportunity to go on mission and to witness. Involvement in these tasks helps youth share the ministry of Jesus and helps make vibrant their own personal growth in the Christian life.

### Notes

1. Francis M. DuBose, "From 'Missions' to 'Mission,'" *The Commission*, July 1969, p. 8.
2. Lawrence O. Richards, *Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Press, 1972), pp. 279-280.
3. Rosalind Rinker, *You Can Witness with Confidence* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Press, 1962), p. 20.
4. Merton P. Strommen, "Project Youth: Training Youth to Reach Youth," *Charac-*

*ter Potential: a Record of Research* 1, no. 4 (February 1974): 180.

5. Ted W. Engstrom, "The Challenge of Today's Youth," *Youth and the Church*, ed. Roy G. Irving and Roy B. Zuck (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968), p. 14.

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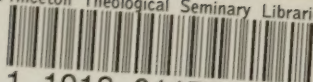








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